Masculinity and Violence in 21st-Century U.S. Film: 'A History of Violence' and 'Drive'

Memòria d'Investigació

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INTRODUCTION

The field of Film Studies is growing in popularity. Many disciplines are beginning to combine their studies with film theory and analysis, such as Social Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Literary Studies, American Studies, English Studies or Cultural Studies. But, why do we need to study films? Are films made to be analysed, or are they just a source of entertainment? In the 20th century, films became one of the most popular sources of entertainment and it seems that they will continue to be so in the 21st century, in combination with other audiovisual formals (TV fiction, videogames, etc.). However, studying films can be seen as an enriching experience that will help us to formalise its capacity to transmit emotions and values scene after scene. There has been a recent increment of film journals and magazines, documentaries and TV programs on the world of cinema which reaffirms this growing interest in deciphering the cinematic world. Cinema is an integral feature of Western society and culture but it is also very important in other cultures such as India. It can be understood as a mirror which reflects the world that surrounds us, our problems, our hopes, our desires and our fears. Since the emergence of film in 1895 as a new form of expression, many changes have taken place.

> It was clear how it might be used, what its purpose should be and how people would react to it. In effect, film production was an experiment. Audiences were certainly amazed by the new phenomenon but film-makers wondered how long its novelty value would last. We now know, of course that film has become a global industry. Cinema is a central part of our lives and over time a range of conventions have developed for making films. (Abrams, Bell and Udris 2010: 3)

Films need to be seen as a form of art. Good films are now what classic literature used to be when it first appeared. While Shakespeare achieved huge success and admiration with literature, directors now earn recognition with films. They do not use the written word but the do use the innumerable cinematic and visual techniques that cinema offer. Cinema is a wonderful universe where past, present and future events can be pictured on the screen and be shown to the spectator. It can portray events with great precision and detail using different styles, genres and techniques. Films have proved to have an impact on society in numerous ways. Apart from the aesthetic experience of watching a film, movies encourage people to take part in a social experience. Going to the cinema contributes to build a sense of cooperation and alliance with others. Most importantly, films help film-makers to convey their beliefs about different topics. The representation of problems in society as well as other concerns make films valuable objects of study.

> The cinema, in sum, enchants for multiple reasons. Much more than a record or a chronicle, a document or treatise, it has an immersive dimension that engages our senses and emotions. It offers imaginative

> engagement with constructed worlds that draw us into a microcosm resembling the world we already know but that is now shaped and patterned in distinctive ways. By sharing the experiences of the characters that live on screen, a hero, a family, or a small group of characters, we enter into microcosms that bear strong resemblances to aspects of the historical world itself. (Nichols 2010: 10)

The cinema has the power to tell stories. Every film is a universe on its own; however, although all films are unique, they share some observable features. Films have been a form of communication since they came to existence using audiovisual material to convey their narratives and messages. In order to tell its stories, cinema has its own language, which can be used in innumerable ways; innovation is endless and film-makers never stop to surprise the audience with new styles and techniques. In films, setting, props, light, composition or performance are means to transmit ideas and meaning. Besides, the way of recording the elements in a particular scene – cinematography – and obtaining the desired shot are key to make a visual impact on the viewer. Edition and sound also have a major role when it comes to transmitting meaning. All these aspects need to be considered part of the language of films. Musicals, for instance, rely on songs to express the emotions and experiences of the characters and to transmit the main themes and ideas of the film. Soundtrack is essential in films since it creates the emotional atmosphere and helps to convey meaning. Thus, we could argue that there are many aspects to take into account when understanding a film. Moreover, the audience's interpretation of the filmic text is also altered by the world they know. Their social reality, background or capacity for imagination will be vital to enter the cinematic world and accept its rules. Over the years, viewers, as well as films, have opened up their boundaries and welcomed new forms of cinema. From the invention of the first movie camera in the 1880s to the present day, many changes have taken place. Films in the 1930s were still silent productions. Now, films have become a wonderful tool of communication and a source of entertainment that do not stop surprising us with its outstanding qualities. What it is true is that the classical model of the Hollywood film does not longer exist; we now have different ways of making and perceiving films. The growing universe of technology and the internet has offered new styles of telling stories which have captured the most delicate eye. Cinema is a huge industry that has a lot to offer and that no doubt will embrace other changes to come in the near future.

In the past decade there has also been a growing interest in the relationship between cinema and gender. This emerged from feminism, which felt the necessity to study the representation of women in filmic texts. Feminist film studies opened the path for other objects of study such as men and masculinity. However, the study of masculinity in cinema was not noticeable until the 1980s with the publication of Steven Neale's essay "Masculinity as Spectacle". So why do we study gender

in films? Media in general and films are vital elements in a person's life. In films we encounter different representations of women and men that turn out to be crucial to understand their behaviour and identity. Therefore, it would be illogical to say that these images and representations do not have an impact on their audiences. People are interested in discovering how we are defined through gender, exploring out sexuality when compared to other human beings.

> The physical characteristics which determine our gender are with us from the day we are born and are changeable only by surgery; exactly how much of gender is socialised, is constructed, is debatable however. We are usually aware that we belong to one gender or the other but sexual identity is more complex than simply being biologically determined male or female: the 'gender role' and therefore gender identity seem to be almost wholly learned. (Nelmes 2007: 221)

The portrayal of gender in films can be seen as a reflection of the problems of both men and women in our society. Directors capture images of both men and women performing different roles in situations that serve us to decipher symbolism and highly charged scenes giving us a better understanding of the real world. Therefore, film characters and cinema in general allow us to recognise certain traits of masculinity and femininity, offering, at the same time, a better understanding of gender, society and humanity in general.

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), by Laura Mulvey, is one of the most important essays on gender and cinema. It focused on the idea that all representations in cinema were marked by a system of binary oppositions: women were defined as the passive objects of the look and men were portrayed as the active side, identifying with the cinematic male gaze. Mulvey's essay shed light on the role of men and women in films and it presented men as the patriarchal dominant figure. However, although it is true that in classic Hollywood films one can label the male as the strong figure and the female as the weak counterpart, gender does not follow such and strict pattern nowadays.

Steven Neale's "Masculinity as Spectacle" (1983) was written as a response to Mulvey's conclusions. It is an essay where he criticises some of the arguments that she used in hers. Neale's article claims that Mulvey ignored some representations of masculinity in cinema. He states that some of the ways in which she argued that we can interpret women in films can also be adjusted to the male figure. Neale defended an exhaustive examination of the characters presented in the filmic text and the need for a multilayered study not only rooted in feminism. He argues that that way in which we identify with certain characters depends on different things; we do not only identify with the male or the female depending on our sex. Neale stated that not only can women be the objects of the look but men also can be portrayed as passive characters: "Neale argues that male figures can be

the subject of voyeuristic looking also. In male-centred genres such as war, action, westerns and gangsters films there are binary opposites in the form of opposing forces which struggle for power and control" (Nelmes 2007: 239-240). "Masculinity as Spectacle" opened up a debate about the study of masculinity in films. Neale supported the idea that masculinity was far from being simple and unproblematic and that therefore needed to be studied in the same way as female identity. The complexity of how we identify with characters in films offers us the opportunity to go deeper into the universe of cinema to achieve a wider portrayal of gender in both mainstream and independent cinema. Contemporary cinema, with all its variations, is a window through which we can observe the perplexing nature of our society, our hopes and our desires; therefore, our identity.

The relationship between masculinity and cinema is central in this dissertation. In the first chapter we will study the evolution of the concept of masculinity and discuss its development in the world of film studies. Studies on masculinities experienced a change with the emergence of gay, civil and feminist revolutions, which opened a new road for men's studies to follow. It was second-wave feminism in the 1960s which really marked a change in the function of consciousness-raising groups and in men's understanding of themselves, since women began to question patriarchal society and their role in society when compared to men.

Men's studies started in the 1970s as a reaction to feminism and the women's liberation movement. Over the years, men's studies gained higher recognition when a growing number of authors started publishing on men's topics. However, it was not until the late 1980s that North American men's studies grew as an established field of research. Masculinity began to be considered a field of study that supported and gave a better understanding of gay men, femininity and ethnicity. Sociologists started to reconsider gender relations and the concept of masculinity because of the common thoughts that homosexuality was a source of embarrassment to the 'true' man. The gay liberation movement, together with the feminist movement, helped to promote a new understanding of masculinities, challenging the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Male activists started to realise that men were in the middle of an identity crisis and that the traditional definition of masculinity no longer suited their needs. Some men reconsidered their roles and their relationships with women and society in general.

Men's studies in the United States experienced a rapid growth and expanded their fields of interest: culture, family values, power and violence, health and sexual relations are some of the topics studied when dealing with men and masculinity. Nowadays, the range of topics that could be examined in connection to masculinity is endless. With the rapid growth of men's studies, it is inevitable to affirm the importance of the studies of masculinity and gender for all societies.

Consequently, in this dissertation we will study some of the most relevant issues on masculinity focusing on aspects of violence.

Masculinity and Violence in 21st-Century U.S. Film: 'A History of Violence' and 'Drive' concentrates, as mentioned in the title, on U.S.-produced cinema of the 21st century to analyse different types of violence and their relationship with masculinity. The selected corpus includes two independent – *indie* – films which were acclaimed by both the audience and the critics. *A History of Violence* (2005) by David Cronenberg and *Drive* (2011) by Nicolas Winding Refn are violent films where masculinity has a major role. Both productions offer a similar structure when studying violence since in the two, once violence appears, it gains importance and relevance in the story. The main protagonists' gender identity is altered due to their relationship with violence. They seem to live in a world that no longer belongs to them, a world in which violence is vital to build up their true identity as real masculine heroes. It is true, however, that many questions come to our mind when we try to understand the origins of this research, so let us start with the first one: Why do we want to study independent cinema of the 21st century to study issues of masculinity and violence?

In the late 1990s a great variety of films start to offer a new vision of masculinity; troubled men who need to balance their problems as a father, a breadwinner and, at the same time, a sensitive man with his own problems and worries. Examples of these movies are, among others, *Fight Club* (1999) and *American Phycho* (2000). Men in these films are presented as anxious human beings under the effects of their masculinity crisis. Both the unnamed narrator in *Fight Club* (Edward Norton) and Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale) in *American Psycho* decide to make use of violence to fight their problems as men. Films of the 1990s introduce a negative perception of the virile masculine hero which dooms them to redemption and self-destruction. At the beginning of the 21st century, there is a growing interest in films which celebrate the plurality of masculinity and films that show the harsh reality of men who, until recently, had been portrayed as superior and dominant characters, a fact that will be seen through the analysis of the chosen corpus for this work. Directors are interested in producing films which offer different reflections on the mutant and pluralistic category of masculinity to show a better and wider understanding of the men in both films and real life. After the attacks of 9/11, cinema and media in general centred on the reconstruction of powerful masculine narratives. The United States was no longer thought to be an invincible nation since two planes had destroyed one of its most important landmarks, the Twin Towers, killing thousands of people. Mainstream Hollywood cinema experienced a burst in the depiction of heroic portrayals of masculinities, above all, in superhero films such as *Spiderman* (2002), *Hulk* (2003) or *Batman Begins* (2005), which offered and exaltation of the male figure. People needed something to believe in, new superheroes which helped to rebuild lost hopes in better times.

Independent cinema, which has to be understood as a form of film-making that operates outside the control of major studios, is nothing new in the 21st-century industry: "Independent film has always existed in the USA but flourished particularly during and after 1950s following the decline of the studio system. While it may now be hard to distinguish an independent from a major studio, independent films are still a key part of film output in the USA" (Abrams, Bell and Udris 2010: 39-40). After 9/11 there has also been a growing interest in experimenting with innovative styles and topics in independent cinema. Joel and Ethan Coen, for instance, have earned a reputation as independent directors because their films have always been considered to be outside the commercial channels. Their films, which mix different genres and offer innovative styles, deal with issues of gender and masculinity, picturing men who illustrate their criticism of stereotypical male behaviour. *Fargo* (1996), for instance, challenges the masculine stereotype with the role of William H. Macy as Jerry Lundegaard, who is the embodiment of an incompetent failure. His lack of organisation and his difficulties to deal with problems, together with his awkward appearance, identify him as a man in crisis. In the film, there are other examples of men who do not live up to the patriarchal and dominant conception of masculinity. The two criminals, although being really different from Jerry, are also examples of the marginalised nature of men in the film.

Today, some directors – such as Cronenberg and Refn, who are studied in this dissertation – opt to go backwards in time to rescue the traditional portrayal of the patriarchal dominant and virile man and deconstruct it, breaking the dichotomy of good and evil and presenting a new image of men, who fight to recover their status of heroes in a postmodern world full of inconsistencies. Answering, therefore, the question of why choosing the cinema of the 21st century to study questions of violence and masculinity, we can state that this type of films offer us the opportunities to explore new ways of proving that traditional roles of men are always present not only in superhero films, which try to exalt the hopes of a wounded society, but also in films that capture stories of the modern society from which we all belong.

The first objective of this work is to provide an overall understanding of the history of masculinity from its origins to the present day, giving special emphasis to the studies of masculinity in the United States. The key point will be to study the relationship between masculinities and violence, providing socio-historical and cultural explanations of its origin, rather than associating violence to biological factors. The first step will be to study the conceptualisations of violence; later moving to the relationship between masculinity and violence and its association with the culture of the United States, that is to say, studying masculinities and violence in the North American independent films *A History of Violence* and *Drive*. In order to study violence, I am going to follow Peter Iadicola and Anson Shupe's categorisation (interpersonal, institutional and structural

violence), in combination with John Cawelti's concept of heroic violence. Thus, another aim of this dissertation will be to provide powerful and valuable differentiated descriptions and clear representations – in *A History of Violence* and *Drive* – of these four types of violence.

This study is divided into three main chapters. The first one, "Masculinities and Men's Studies. State of the Question", concentrates on presenting men's studies and the evolution of the concept of masculinity in the United States. As a starting point, Freudian theories of psychoanalysis will be examined, then moving to the gay liberation movement, civil rights and the feminist movement, which have had a great impact on the understanding of masculinity. The chapter later focuses on the analysis of the crisis of masculinity and its profound effects, as well as the acknowledgement of the term *masculinity* as a cultural, social and historical construction. Finally, our attention shifts towards contemporary North American studies of masculinity, with a final overview of the evolution of the concepts of masculinity and men's studies until the present day.

The second chapter "Masculinities and Violence" aims to provide a better understanding of the relationship between these two terms, trying to give socio-historical and cultural explanations of its origin, rather than associating violence to biological factors. First, we study the universe of violence so as to have a better understanding of its interaction with masculinity and its association with the culture of the United States. Later we try to capture the different representations of masculinity and violence in North American cinema. Society in general has helped to build the strong link between masculinities and violence. Therefore, cultural products such as mainstream films and independent films, for instance, have been crucial to make people see violence as an inherent trait of male power and dominance. In this way, films contribute to the analysis and reformulation of issues on masculinity and gender in general.

Chaper 3, "Violence and Masculinity in a *History of Violence* and *Drive*", is dedicated to the analysis of the corpus. It centers on analysing four main types of violence: interpersonal, institutional, structural, and heroic violence. Interpersonal violence is violence between individuals, which is not related to any social institution. Although there are many forms of interpersonal violence, in *A History* and *Drive* we will concentrate on homicide because it is the most important and relevant act of violence in both films. As for institutional violence, one needs to clarify that it is not so visible as interpersonal and structural violence. Only recently, for example, has family violence been considered as a serious form of institutional violence. Again, although there are varied types of institutional violence, our aim here will be to focus on family violence and childhood maltreatment because they are the most relevant types of violence in order to understand the evolution of male characters and identities in the corpus. Structural violence is affected by authority and power, since it is power that rules and controls others. The term refers to those

situations that affect basic human needs, such as welfare, identity or freedom, as a consequence of social stratification and, therefore, there is no direct violence. It takes place when there is a conflict between social groups that have different opportunities or different degrees of acceptance because of their sex, nationality, age, social class, etc. It is the result of different inconsistencies that are deeply rooted on solid social structures, which provoke unfair consequences. This work will study the violent consequences that derive from hierarchical relations in society according to aspects such as class, gender or ethnic/racial identity, and their relationship with the characters' violent actions and their masculinity in the films. Some of the common sources of structural violence which we will try to visibilise in our corpus comprise elitism, classism and sexism. Finally, heroic violence is widely perceived as a moral necessity which often ends up with heroic deeds and heroic violent acts. John Cawelti talks about the use of justified violence by the hero. Heroes must be men who triumphantly face their problems and challenges in life without fearing death. This study will attempt to look at male roles in *A History* and *Drive*, where we encounter two potentially aggressive heroes who apparently use their force in a moral and justified way for the benefit of other people. They are men who know how to kill, they are violent, but they are also presented as sensitive men capable of self-control and affection.

In the conclusions chapter there will be a reflection about the process that has led to this dissertation. A revision of the most relevant issues and conclusions that have been presented will be provided. Besides, we will analyse the strengths and weaknesses in the analysis; explaining the difficulties and limitations found throughout the study. Finally, we will focus on some important considerations of this study that remain open for further research.

CHAPTER 1
MASCULINITIES AND MEN'S STUDIES. STATE OF THE QUESTION

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical introduction to men's studies and masculinity from its origins to the present day. Special attention will be paid to the studies of masculinity in the United States. As a starting point Freudian theories of psychoanalysis will be examined, then moving to the gay liberation movement, civil rights and the feminist movement, which have had a great impact on the understanding of masculinity. The chapter will later focus on the analysis of the crisis of masculinity and its profound effects, as well as the acknowledgement of the term *masculinity* as a cultural, social and historical construction. Finally, the focus will shift towards contemporary American studies of masculinity, with a final overview of the evolution of the concepts of masculinity and men's studies.

The Concept of Masculinity: An Evolution

Studies of masculinity have recently been in the limelight, emerging as one of the growing fields of study in sociology. In contrast to feminist theories, which in the Anglo-American context date back to the eighteenth century, with Mary Wollstonecraft and her well known work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), studies of masculinity really came into sight in the second half of the 20th century. Let us then start defining the concept of masculinity. Masculinity is commonly defined as a set of qualities associated with men. Unfortunately, it is not as simple as it seems. The concept of masculinity has evolved a great deal since it first came into existence and, with it, studies of masculinity, also known as men's studies, have found its own place in a society that craved for a revision of traditional gender roles. According to Connell, we should take into consideration three main stages in the course of the 20th century regarding the science of masculinity: "One was based in the clinical knowledge acquired by therapists, and its leading ideas came from Freudian theory. The second was based in social psychology and centred on the enormously popular idea of 'sex role'. The third involves recent developments in anthropology, history and sociology" (2005: 7).

Freud and his scientific theories on masculinity should then be seen as the first attempts to define the concept, and Connell considers "his work the starting-point of the modern thought about masculinity, though most later masculinity researchers have known little and cared less about the detail of his ideas" (2005: 8). In fact, three main stages need to be mentioned in Freud's work on masculinity. It is in the first one that the Oedipus complex accounts for the father-son rivalry and the anxiety for castration. It is also here when Freud "offered the hypothesis that humans were constitutionally bisexual, that masculine and feminine currents coexisted in everyone" (Connell 2005: 9).

The second Freudian period was later considered to be key to understand the advances in the concept of gender. His second period stems from one of his most famous cases, the Wolf Man, which was published in 1918 under the title "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis". The Wolf Man case turned out to be crucial for Freud's studies, since it found a "pre-Oedipal, narcissistic masculinity which underpinned castration anxiety" (Connell 2005: 9). Freud interpreted the dream of his patient Pankejeff – the dream that he had when he was young about white wolves – as the traumatic experience for the boy as a result of having witnessed his parents having sex. He argued that the boy's suffering was rooted in his desire for his father and the identification with his mother, of whom he was jealous. These accounts provided an explanation for the change in the man's heterosexual agitated behaviour as an adolescent to the later disinterest in sex during adulthood. This study proved to be determining in further analysis on masculinity, since it helped to understand that manhood was not a fixed quality and could be distorted under certain pressures.

The concept of the 'super-ego' is crucial in the last stage of Freud's theories and their contribution to the concept of masculinity. As Breger explains, Freud described the super-ego as

> el superyó – que juzga, condena, recompensa y castiga; una parte de la personalidad que se forma a partir de las experiencias reales del sujeto con las figuras relevantes, o revestidas de autoridad, de la infancia. Los niños se identifican con estas figuras importantes de su vida, con el poder y la autoridad de su padre y con el amor y el cariño de su madre, y hacen que estas cualidades formen parte de su ser durante su desarrollo. (2001: 351)

Freud's contribution marked a step forward in the evolution of the concept masculinity, since he paved the way into many secret paths of the human mind providing a new method of research, psychoanalysis, which shoved its way through the study of men and masculinity as a pioneer discipline to be followed by other authors. Such is the case of Alfred Adler and Carl Jung, who later decided to elaborate their own studies on this issue. Adler differed from Freud's arguments, and he received the recognition he deserved with his celebrated theory of the masculine protest: "Adler was rejecting Freud's libido theories as well as his whole enterprise of depth psychology and claimed that he could explain everything in terms of masculine protest, aggression, and the desire to be 'on top'. Freud never embraced these views" (Kaufmann 1992: 250). Carl Jung, in turn, quickly gained popularity and his ideas influenced the North American men's movement. Jungian assumptions state that the condition of masculinity stems from an innate condition and a social construction. He defended the existence of the *anima*, the psychological feminine traits within men. Jung affirmed that men's feminine interior was not only moulded by the men's experiences but also by the existing archetypal images of women.

Before moving to the social sciences theories, it is important to highlight that psychoanalysis was also a field of interest for women; such is the case of Melanie Klein, an Austrian-born British psychoanalyst whose work dates from the beginning to the middle of the 20th century. Klein was one of the pioneer women who brought new contributions to the then current theories: "Melanie Klein's investigations into the early stages of the Oedipus complex led her to differ in certain important respects from Freud's formulations about female sexuality and the importance of the phallic stage in particular" (Segal 1988: 7). She studied children's aggressive behaviour towards the mother and concluded that, contrary to what Freud had thought, children's play was basic to understand their behaviour as adults. Her theory of the 'Play Therapy' is still common in modern psychology. Klein supported the idea of the existence of a pre-Oedipal feminine phase in boys, in which they have to overcome their feelings of distress towards their mother; thus implying the consolidation of their heterosexual dominant position as men.

> When she started working with children she was surprised to discover that children not much over two years of age showed oedipal phantasies and had intense anxieties associated with them. Oedipal phantasies gave rise to fear of primitive persecutory figures – maternal, paternal, or as combined figure often at the very centre of phobias – nightmares and fears. Those phantasy figures exhibited sadistic oral, urethral and anal features, as well as castration threats, due to the projections of infantile sexuality and sadism, and in keeping with the stage of the child's own psychosexual development. (Britton, Feldman, O'Shaughnessy, Steiner 2000: 2)

Klein's theory, however, was refuted by Karen Horney in her paper "The Dread of Woman" (1932). Horney was famous for providing vital theoretical background to feminine psychology. She tried to provide women with a new understanding of themselves that moved away from masculine Freudian psychoanalysis in a male-dominated society. She criticised Freudian psychology for centring on men and for placing women in an inferior position. Horney disagreed with the definition of women as the inferior counterpart to men. Moreover, she cast some doubts upon the theory of the penis envy and suggested that women did not wish to have a penis, but to acquire the recognition that men had always had from society. On the other hand, she also pointed out that men suffered from the womb envy because of their impossibility to give birth, a fact that would explain their urge to impose their lineage on their descendants. According to Connell,

> [f]or Horney, fear of the mother is more deep-seated and more energetically repressed than fear of the castrating father. The vagina itself is the symbolic centre of the process. Boys' feelings of inadequacy lead them to withdraw emotional energy from the mother and focus it on themselves and their genitals – thus preparing

> the ground for castration anxiety. Later reactions among men are fuelled by these emotions. Among them are the tendency to choose socially inferior women as love objects, and the habit of actively undermining women's self-respect in order to support 'the ever precarious self-respect of the "average man". Horney's paper was the high point of the critique of masculinity in classical psychoanalysis. It crystallized two important points: the extent to which adult masculinity is built on over-reactions to femininity, and the connection of the making of masculinity with the subordination of women. (2005: 11)

Moving further in time, it was Simone de Beauvoir who really made the connection between psychoanalysis and gender with her work *The Second Sex* (1949). De Beauvoir argues that the masculine way of thought takes advantage of sexual difference to build patterns of inequality between men and women. Moreover, she criticises the recognition of the masculine subject as the perfect human type. De Beauvoir, in the beginning of her work, feels the need to define herself:

> "Soy una mujer"; esta verdad constituye el fondo del cual se extraerán todas las demás afirmaciones. Un hombre no comienza jamás por presentarse como individuo de un determinado sexo: que él sea hombre es algo que se da por supuesto. Es solo de una manera formal, en los registros de las alcaldías y el las declaraciones de identidad, donde las rúbricas de masculino y femenino aparecen como simétricas. La relación de los dos sexos no es la de dos electricidades, la de dos polos: el hombre representa a la vez el positivo y el neutro […] La mujer aparece como el negativo, ya que toda determinación le es imputada como limitación, sin reciprocidad. (1949: 4)

She establishes a contrast between men and women, arguing that women need to define themselves as opposed to men so as to find their own private space. In doing so, women become alienated as a 'different' group that has a personal, but still inferior, voice. It is important to highlight that De Beauvoir made an important contribution to feminist studies and helped them to grow as a discipline. However, Connell clarifies that

> apart from de Beauvoir there was little interaction between feminism and psychoanalysis between the early 1930s and the late 1960s. Yet the potentials of psychoanalysis gradually emerged in feminist thought, in two main forms. The first stemmed from the work of Jacques Lacan. Feminists influenced by Lacan, such as Juliet Mitchell in Britain and Luce Irigaray in France, have been more concerned to theorize femininity than masculinity. Yet this work has an implicit account of masculinity. (2005: 19)

It is undeniable that Freud and psychoanalysis had a great impact on masculinity and men's studies. In fact, masculinity can be rooted in his theories. Nonetheless, the study of masculinity through the prism of psychoanalysis fails to offer the social value that so deeply affects personality and human behaviour. Sociologists made an attempt to describe masculinity as alterable due to

social and cultural reasons. Thus, social sciences moved away from psychoanalysis trying to provide an understanding of social structures and male behaviour.

The notion of a male sex role, which is rooted in the late nineteenth century, when debates about gender differences started to take place, turned out to be essential for building a social science of masculinity. In Connell's words, "there are two ways in which the role concept can be applied to gender. In one, the roles are seen specific to definite situations. […] Much more common, however, is the second approach, in which being a man or a woman means enacting a *general* set of expectations which are attached to one's sex – the 'sex role'" (2005: 22). The understanding of masculinity having its roots in the male sex role forces us to keep in mind social change; roles being modifiable by social processes such as family life, school, and friendship, among others.

In "The New Burdens of Masculinity" Helen Hacker suggests that men are also influenced by expressive functions as well as the traditional ones:

> As a man, men are now expected to demonstrate the manipulative skill in interpersonal relations formerly reserved to women under the headings of intuition, charm, tact, coquetry, womanly wiles, etcetera. They are asked to bring patience, understanding, gentleness to their human dealings. Yet with regard to woman they must still be sturdy oaks. (1957: 229)

Hacker's role theory, "could even admit the idea of conflict within masculinity, derived from conflicting or unmanageable social expectations rather than from repression" (Connell 2005: 23). In the 1970s, the sex role theory prospered with the rise of feminism. However, the female sex role was conceived as burdensome – women being pigeonholed as inferior and submissive individuals. Joseph Pleck, in his work *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981), challenged the concept of the male sex role. Pleck "argued that the male sex role model was incapable of describing men's experiences. In its place, he posited a male 'sex role strain' model that specified the contemporary sex role as problematic, historically specific, and also an unattainable ideal" (Kimmel and Aronson 2004: xxi). Pleck's contribution marked the beginning of numerous critiques on the sex role theory. Sex roles were understood as fixed patterns for men and women to follow, underlining the differences among men and women – always placing men in a superior position. However, new studies pointed out that the understanding of masculinity was highly dependent on the understanding of femininity. Moreover, gender role theories began to consider the male sex role as being exclusive to *other* sex roles – gay men, men of colour, old men, young men, etc. Men were forced to fit one specific major dominant role and those who did not match it were conceived as inferior and subordinate beings:

> What Pleck proposed instead was a non-normative sex role theory, one that disconnected the role from the self. He wanted a model of the male sex role which allowed that sex role conformity might be psychologically dysfunctional; that the role norms might change, and at times ought to; and that many people did violate norms, and might suffer retribution, so many people also overconformed. This would make the theory of the male role more internally consistent, shaking off the bits of biological determinism and identity theory that clung to it; but it would not break out of the intellectual limits of the role perspective. (Connell 2005: 26)

Connell strongly criticises the role theory as vague because it fails to understand social life and social behaviour and to take into account people as human agents – capable of change and adaptation to new situations. Thus, the sex role theory turns out to be baseless for studying gender relations and masculinity, since in gender interaction roles are not strictly categorised and alteration is ever-present.

It is evident that the term 'masculinity' experienced an abrupt change in the course of the 20th century and that it is still evolving. It is important to remember, however, that the concept is often replaced by the term 'masculinities' in order to avoid the understanding masculinity as a unique, single possibility. Using the term in the plural our understanding of men broadens, as it embraces different definitions of masculinity. According to Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson in *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopaedia*,

> [t]he use of the plural – masculinities – recognizes the dramatic variation in how different groups define masculinity, even in the same society at the same time, as well as individual differences. Although social forces operate to create systematic differences between men and women, on average on some dimensions, even these differences *between* women and men are not as great as the differences *among* men or *among* women. (2004: 503)

Moreover, Kimmel states that masculinity varies depending on four different spheres: culture, geographical situation, the course of the person's life and the characteristics of the society the person is a member of alter the man's behaviour and personality. With such evidence, Kimmel and Aronson explain that we can no longer speak of a universal manhood common to all men: "Thus, gender must be seen as an ever-changing fluid assemblage of meanings and behaviours and we must speak of *masculinities*. By pluralizing the terms, we acknowledge that masculinity means different things to different groups of people at different times" (2004: 504).

The statement that masculinities are plural and variable should not come as a surprise today, after decades of development of the women's, men's and gender studies areas. Unfortunately, every man is forced to fight against a preconceived definition of masculinity. The concept of a 'hegemonic

masculinity' was first introduced by R. W. Connell referring to the dominant masculinity. As he states in *Masculinities*,

> [t]he concept of 'hegemony', deriving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (2005: 77)

However, contrary to what many may think, this definition of masculinity is still present in contemporary society in spite of the fact that, during the late 20th century, many authors questioned the hegemonic conceptualisation. Thus, since its appearance until our times there have been many revisions of its initial meaning, and it is also true that the concept of hegemony has forced an ongoing debate on the understanding of masculinities and has helped men's studies to develop as a discipline. Michael Kimmel, who has already been introduced, fought to move away from the fixed and traditional understanding of manliness. Moreover, authors such as Harry Brod with *The Making of Masculinities* (1987) and the ever-present Robert W. Connell opened new paths into the study of masculinities and gender.

Masculinity requires an approach that takes into consideration the feminist scheme as well as an understanding of masculine values as plural and multiple – values that are modifiable according to cultural and social values. However, although a plural understanding of the concept 'masculinity' has been proposed by some authors, American studies on masculinity have continued to focus on hegemonic masculinity so as to keep alive the ongoing debate on white heterosexual power and superiority. There have been many definitions of masculinity since the first appearance of the concept. Yet as Connell suggests,

> [a]ll societies have cultural accounts of gender, not all have the concept 'masculinity'. In its modern usage the term assumes that one's behaviour results from the type of person one is. That is to say, an unmasculine person would behave differently: being peaceable rather than violent, conciliatory rather than dominating, hardy able to kick a football, uninterested in sexual conquest, and so forth. (2005: 67)

Already in the 21st century, Arthur Brittan, in the article "Masculinities and Masculinism" gives a new definition of masculinity which tries to embrace the current theories:

> Men are now 'into' fatherhood. They look after children, they sometimes change nappies and, in some cases, they stay at home and play the role of houseperson. […] The implication here is that male identity is a fragile and tentative thing with no secure anchorage in the contemporary world. Such fragility makes it almost impossible to talk about masculinity as though it had some recognizable substantive basis. And yet, in everyday and academic discourse, we find that men are commonly described as aggressive, assertive, independent, competitive, insensitive and so on. These attributions are based on the idea that there is something about men which transcends their local situation. Men are seen as having natures which determine their behaviour in all situations. (2001: 53)

Brittan defines a 'new man' that has accepted fatherhood and plays the role of a houseperson. Not all men fit in the definition of the powerful patriarchal man. In fact, men (in the plural) can take many roles. We can no longer talk about one traditional masculinity but of many masculinities that are willing to adapt to new social roles. Àngels Carabí, in *Nuevas masculinidades* (2000), also considers that the concept of 'men' is under construction:

> La masculinidad tradicional, como hemos visto, no es un valor esencialista, sino culturalmente construido. Y precisamente por ser un constructo social y porque las realidades sociales no son estáticas, es susceptible de ser modificada. En su proceso de deconstruir la artificiosidad de la sociedad jerárquica, los grupos marginados han provocado que el varón comience a revisar los presupuestos en que se ha asentado su masculinidad y con ello, la posibilidad de construir nuevas sociedades. Muchos hombres ya han comenzado a ser críticos de la masculinidad convencional. (2000: 23)

It is highly noticeable here that contemporary definitions of masculinity seem to have stemmed from Simone De Beauvoir's idea that "one is not born a (wo)man, but becomes one", a statement included in her work *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir denied the fact that women are born "feminine" and criticised the roles that women were forced to accept, for instance, the fact that women were educated to be passive and submissive, whereas men adopted the active and authoritative roles. Applying her conclusions to the study of masculinity helped scholars to reshape traditional definitions. Therefore, we could summarise that masculinity can change in relation to culture, society and historical events. Moreover, on an individual level, masculinity can also evolve and/or be modified from boyhood to adulthood. And even in a mature state, masculinity may be remodeled endlessly.

John Beynon, author of *Masculinities and Culture* (2002), offers a comprehensive research on masculinity from the perspective of very different areas such as media studies, social studies or cultural studies. His main goal is to widen the perception of the term 'masculinity' and to provide a diversity of contexts where it can be applied and studied. He affirms that

> [m]en are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up; rather it is something into which they are acculturated and which is composed of social codes of behaviour which they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways. It is indexical of class, subculture, age and ethnicity, among other factors. Furthermore, any easy generalizations like 'working class', 'middle class', 'gay' or 'black' masculinities are greatly misleading because within each if these broad categories there is considerable variation in both experience and presentation. (2002: 2)

Apart from supporting the conception of pluralised masculinities, this critic helped to unearth new disciplines and fields of study, such as media studies – television, advertising and film studies. He stated that mediated masculinities offer the scenario for valuable portrayals of manhood and masculinity. Beynon's scope of study does not end here, but expands on the representation of men in magazines, consumerism, beauty and health propaganda, among others.

Men's Studies

Joseph Pleck is often considered one of the foundational authors of men's studies with his work *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981), together with Peter Filene's *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (1974). Whereas Pleck exposed the inconsistencies in the sex role theory and stated that traditional masculinity was worthless to describe the modern man, Filene urged men to redefine themselves in order to live in gendered peace. Harry Brod, responsible for *The Making of masculinities* (1987), defined men's studies as "the study of masculinity as a *specific male* experience, rather than a universal paradigm for *human* experience" (40). Brod is often considered to be one of the founding fathers of men's studies not only for being the first author to coin the term 'masculinities' in the plural form, but also for analysing men and manhood through the prisms of concepts and theories which derived from women's studies.

The civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, which paved the way for the feminist movement to grow as field of study, had an important impact on masculinity since they contributed to give voice to minority men. As Bret Carroll states, "[c]ivil rights activism allowed minority men an equal voice in determining their own political destinies and masculine identities, diversifying the concept of manhood in America" (2003: 93). These social episodes constituted what is commonly known as the first wave of masculinity studies, and several authors took part in the rapid growth of men's studies as a discipline.

As a result of the previously mentioned social (r)evolutions, from the early 1970s onwards, women's studies in the United States took a step forward and gained importance. In fact, men's

studies are closely linked to women's studies and the urge that women had to find their own voice in society in a male-dominated world. Men found themselves observing the changing role of women in society and reconsidering their own role as men, a fact that gave rise to the so called men's movement, which later developed into men's studies. Consequently, it brought about a revision of gender that had an inevitable effect for scholars when dealing with studies of masculinities. It became inevitable for studies of masculinities to expand its analysis through the prism of gender studies. Research on masculinity/ies experienced a change with the emergence of gay, civil and feminist revolutions, which opened a new road for men's studies to follow. Thus, it can be stated that men's studies originated in the 1970s as a reaction to feminism and the women's liberation movement.

In the 1980s, men's studies gained higher recognition when a growing number of authors started publishing on men's topics and concerns from different academic perspectives and within varied fields of knowledge. Scholars tried to give masculinity a new frame which would move away from the powerful/powerless dichotomy. Although it was true that men as a group still had power over women, some men did not fit in any established category of masculinity and needed to fight to make themselves visible. Michael Kimmel and other scholars revised some contradictory definitions of the term and gave men new routes to follow so as to redefine themselves as a social collective.

However, it was not until the late 20th century that North American men's studies grew as an established field of research. It centred on marginal men and took into account aspects such as race, sexuality, social class, and other variables that helped to understand men as plural. Scholars working from a gender perspective began to conceive masculinity as a field that supported and gave a better understanding of gay men, femininity and ethnicity. So, whereas men's studies, around the 1970s, gave priority to the white heterosexual man, in the 1980s focus shifted on minority men and perceived men's identity/ies as plural and unstable.

Furthermore, gay liberationists urged sociologists to reconsider gender relations and the concept of masculinity because of their scornful remarks implying that homosexuality was a source of embarrassment to the "real" man. The gay movement, which gained importance in the late 1960s, was strictly critical on those who considered homosexuality to be a disease. Moreover, liberationists insisted on the recognition of a homosexual identity claiming that the problem arose from the fixed definition of masculinity. Joseph Pleck, who was not part of the gay liberation movement, shared the belief that any sign of weakness or feebleness in men is related to the concept of homosexuality. As Carrigan, Connell and Lee state in the article "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity" (2002), the emerging history of male homosexuality offers the most valuable starting point for constructing

a historical perspective on masculinities at large. The history of homosexuality demands an understanding of masculinity as a construction in a changing social structure which is concerned with sexual power relations. Thus, it is undeniable that the gay liberation movement, together with the feminist movement, helped to promote a new understanding of masculinities, challenging the concept of hegemonic masculinity. A concept which fails to provide a social understanding of manhood since it can be described as supporting the dominant male role and the consequent subordination of women. Hegemony equals control and power:

> Gay activists were the first contemporary group of men to address the problem of hegemonic masculinity outside of a clinical context. They were the first group of men to apply the political techniques of women's liberation, and to align with feminists on issues of sexual politics – in fact to argue for the importance of sexual politics. (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 2002: 108)

The work *Rediscovering Masculinity* (1989) by Victor Seidler is another important study which demands our attention. The author vouches for the control of feelings and the negation of one's sexuality in the construction of masculinity. Moreover, he condemns the traditional patriarchal association between men and reason, which, from his point of view, encourages the artificial normalised idea that women are subordinated to men.

By the 1990s, male activists had realised that men were in the middle of an identity crisis and that the traditional definition of masculinity no longer suited their needs; therefore, a new consciousness was bound to arise. At the beginning, the discipline of men's studies was mainly articulated around consciousness-raising (CR) groups, which had a good understanding with feminist groups in general, and which helped men to understand how they behaved and their social roles and functions. Men started to reconsider their roles and their relationships with women and society in general. It was second-wave feminism which truly marked a change in the function of consciousness-raising groups and in men's understanding of themselves, since women began to question patriarchal society and the role of their husbands and other men. Nowadays, CR collectives still exist as support groups and as single-issue movements where social problems such as gender violence, homophobia and other issues are dealt with.

Kimmel acknowledges that manhood is inevitably shaped by social events and historical and cultural episodes such as the gay liberation movement, the civil rights and feminist theories. However, men should learn to be proud as they evolve and move away from old traditional values:

> The idea that manhood is socially constructed and historically shifting should not be understood as a loss, that something is being taken away from men. In fact, it gives us something extraordinary valuable – agency, the

> capacity to act. It gives us a sense of historical possibilities to replace the despondent resignation that invariably attends timeless, ahistorical essentialisms. Our behaviours are not simply "just human nature", because "boys will be boys." From the materials we find around us in our culture – other people, ideas, objects – we actively create our worlds, our identities. Men, both individually and collectively, can change. (Kimmel 2010: 155)

It is evident that Kimmel's quote reflects his own involvement as a man when defending his own arguments. In this same way, several other authors from the 1980s and beyond had already decided to use their personal experiences as men when dealing with masculinities and gender relationships. Such is the case of Mike Clary with *Daddy's Home* (1982) and of Samuel Osherson with *The Passions of Fatherhood* (1995), who focused on the topic of fatherhood using their own family experiences. Another author worth mentioning here is Robert Bly, whose book *Iron John: A Book About Men* (1990) was a huge success in the 1990s. Bly, who is thought to be one of the most representative authors of the men's movement, was criticised for moving away from pro-feminist men. In fact, he has been commonly criticised for vindicating traditional gender roles. But still, some scholars supported his ideas and defended him, implying that his work was a step forwards to the understanding of human sexuality. Basically, he attributed the differences between men and women to biological qualities, and not to cultural or social reasons. Bly encouraged men to follow stereotyped roles which embodied their supremacy, such as the brave warrior or the authoritative king. He used the Brothers Grimm's tale "Iron John" to illustrate the maturing of a boy, trying to show what it means to be a man. He focused on the wilderness of the story to provide his own definition of manhood. In this text, a wild man becomes a powerful king; a story that for Bly is a metaphorical representation of the transition of a man into manhood.

David Gilmore's *Manhood in the Making* (1990) is an exceptional anthropological study of masculinity. Gilmore made use of this scientific field to reveal key issues on men and masculinity, debating the existence of a masculine model or archetype:

> Among most of the peoples that anthropologists are familiar with, true manhood is a precious and elusive status beyond mere maleness, a hortatory image that men and boys aspire to and that their culture demands of them as a measure of belonging. […] A restricted status, there are always men who fail the test. These are the negative examples, the effete men, the men-who-are-no-men, held up scornfully to inspire conformity to the glorious ideal. (Gilmore 1990: 17)

According to this thinker, cultural patterns in society guide men to fulfill their functions as 'real' men. They become fathers, benefactors and defenders of their families and children. However,

Gilmore fails to take into account diversity within society and the differences among men and women when it comes to their role and power in the social sphere. Women's actions concerning family duties and family care, for instance, are taken for granted whereas parallel men's functions are studied as culturally valuable and taken as central issues in masculinity research. Whereas it is true that masculinity is deeply affected by different social spheres, to acknowledge differences in masculinities is not enough. It is therefore required to discuss the relations between the diverse types of manhood, such as the relations of submission, superiority, domination or cooperation. This acceptance demands a broader understanding of the term 'masculinity' as diverse and heterogeneous: "We can see that masculinities are plural and multiple, they differ over space, time and context, are rooted only in the cultural and social moment, and are, thus, inevitably entwined with other powerful and influential variables such as sexuality, class, age and ethnicity" (Whitehead 2002: 34). The acceptance of multiple masculinities, however, runs the risk of leaving behind women and not taking them into account when trying to understand men. And as Collinson and Hearn affirm in the article "Naming Men as Men" (1994), "the analysis of men and masculinities is likely to be enhanced, we contend, when the relation to women and femininity is acknowledged" (150).

Warren Farrell's is one of the other relevant names in order to understand the evolution of men's studies. His most important work is *The Liberated Man* (1993), a remarkable book about men and women and the challenging conception of their interchangeable roles in society. According to Connell, Farrell offered a vigorous critique of the masculine value system and the way men were trapped by the male role. It is also crucial to mention Roger Horrocks and his work *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies and Realities* (1994). Horrocks describes masculinity as burdensome and oppressive for men. He claims that men are trapped in a deep crisis because traditional values have changed. He states that patriarchal power over women ends up going against men, who are equally psychologically disfigured. Therefore, traditional masculinity is men's worst betrayer since it inevitably misleads men towards self-criticism and further betrayal of themselves.

Continuing on a different vein, women had also a say when dealing with men's studies. In 2000, Susan Faludi published *Stiffed*, where she addresses masculinity directly, claiming that traditional masculinity no longer exists. In 1991, she had published *Blacklash,* where she argued that culture in general was man-oriented and that women were suffering from this fact because they tried to be at the same level as men following masculine patterns. In *Stiffed* she rethinks her own views expressed in the scorching work *Backlash*, explaining that men undergo cultural episodes that make them vulnerable and weak in modern society. Men are subject to a personality crisis in a society that had always defined them as oppressors and superior to women. Susan Faludi supported

the idea of the existence of a masculinity crisis. She perceived men as victims of society and the effects of economic, family and cultural changes. Thus, she suggests that both men and women share the same problems. Therefore, they should work together against their common enemy, the social conventions, which are central to the conflict of the modern man.[1] In fact, according to Connell, masculinity needs to be studied bearing in mind femininity and their mutual interaction, since they are innately associative concepts: "Knowledge of masculinity arises within the project of knowing gender relations. […] Masculinities are configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change" (2005: 44).

Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett are authors who insist on the notion of crisis of masculinity in Western societies, as they do in their article "The Sociology of Masculinity":

> Recognising that Western societies in particular have experienced enormous social, technical, and economic change over the past five decades, one should not be surprised at the propensity of commentators to declare a crisis of masculinity. For it would be inconceivable that men, individually and as political category, having for so long been unquestionably central to political, religious, and economic life, would not be challenged by the major social and cultural disruptions which marked the twentieth century. (2001: 9)

These authors argue that there have been important social transformations that are beyond men's grasp and whose implications are deeply-felt:

> For example, men can no longer presume to enjoy a secure life-long career; male-dominated industrialization has largely given way to more female-orientated service industries: women are increasingly exercising choice over relationships, divorce, child-bearing and their sexual expression; the very character and notion of the 'family' has shifted dramatically, and is no longer confined to or even dominated by the patriarchal nuclear version; the concept of the male breadwinner family is almost dead, with most dual households now having two income providers; notions of class, having long sustained divisions in masculinity, are now subsumed under often obscure symbolic patterns of consumption and not confined to any specific ethnic or social grouping; and gay sexuality, long the 'Other' which served to define hegemonic masculinity, is no longer confined to the closet, but openly expressed if not celebrated in most Western cities. (Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 9)

Together with the evolution of the definition of masculinity, men's studies in the United States have experienced a rapid change and expanded their fields of interest. Harry Brod in *The Making of masculinities* (1987) had already discussed the existence of groups dedicated to exploring new conceptions of masculinity and explained that research on men's studies covered five main

1 For more on Susan Faludi, see *The Terror Dream. Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (2007).

topics: culture, family values, power and violence, health and sexual relations. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, the range of topics that could be studied in connection to masculinity was endless, including new areas of research such as sport, media and film studies.

There are other indicators of the rapid growth of men's studies. In fact, the well-known online bibliography of writing on men, masculinities, gender and sexuality "The Men's Bibliography" by Michael Flood has had nineteen editions since it first appeared in 1992, and it has immensely grown in articles, visitors and popularity. Moreover, several journals about men and men's studies have gained worldwide recognition, such as the *Journal of Men's Studies,* published by Men's Studies Press, or the journal *Men and Masculinities* (SAGE Journals), among others.

This has been an attempt to give a general overview of the evolution of men's studies from its origins to the present day. Although different authors and trends have been studied, it goes without saying that many more could have very well been included. The rise and development of the feminist movement made men's studies thrive. However, not only did feminism contribute to their maturation as a discipline, but so did also other crucial social and political episodes in U.S. history, such as the civil rights movement(s) and the gay liberation movement. New revolutionary paths were opened that have been followed by theorists who have made innovative insights in gender studies. Masculinity then needs to be understood as an evolving construction, modifiable by culture, society, ethnicity and history. Then, it is inevitable at this point to reject the notion of *one* "Masculinity" – with a capital 'M' – since *masculinities* have turned out to be elastic entities that mould over time embracing cultural, social, ethnical and historical changes affecting the lives of men.

Masculinity and Film Studies

Men's studies have gained importance in relation to media and film studies because these disciplines offer new sources and scenes where men's roles can be analysed as representations of society. It is crucial to mention here the importance of Laura Mulvey, whose essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) is said to be a pioneer work in the analysis of gender in film studies. As stated above, her work had a great impact in the 1970s and early 1980s, since it opened a debate on the representations of women in films and their relevance in academic gender studies.

In the 1970s, films began to be regarded as closed books ready to be opened and analysed. Jill Nelmes, in *Introduction to Film Studies,* a work first published in 1996, states that

> [h]ow gender is portrayed on film does to some extent reflect concerns and anxieties in our society about who we are which are re-enacted through stories, through the narrative. The acting of male and female roles is a performance, a simulation, it is not fixed but constantly shifting. Film is a re-presentation of images, it is not reality but a series of shots with actors playing characters. These images are concentrated, symbolic and highly charged; they have a super-powered meaning. (2007: 221)

Films were then perceived as mirror stories where viewers could identify with character and gender types. Therefore, studies on gender and film tried to find recognisable elements of femininity and masculinity that could offer a better understanding of the world and the society we live in. However, the growing interest in film studies cast some doubts on other key issues, as is the case of the conception of film as a "window on the world". Feminist argued that most films were patriarchally-tinted windows and therefore they did not offer a fair account of reality.

Laura Mulvey was one of the feminist film critics who started to bring women's concerns into the field and began to question male dominance in the media. She states that the "image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favourite cinematic form – illusionistic narrative film." (1999: 843), and she concludes saying that traditional film conventions spoil "the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the 'invisible guest', and highlights how film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms" (1999: 844). In fact, her conclusions concerning the binary oppositions in gender dichotomies ended up being vital for the questioning of the male role in films and paved the way for the ongoing studies on contemporary gender and film studies.

One of the first works to study masculinity and film studies in the United States is *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film* (1977) by Joan Mellen. She described men as 'big bad wolves' due to the existing dominant, repressive and powerful portrayals of masculine characters she detected in films from the 1920s to the 1970s. She fiercely denounced the John Wayne masculine type which embodied the ideal man in the media. Moreover, she affirmed that traditional male values were so strong at those times that men refused to accept any role that could make them weak and vulnerable to the world.

In 1983 Steve Neale published the aforementioned "Masculinity as Spectacle", which is a brave attempt to put into practice and challenge Mulvey's arguments in films that offered examples of masculinity. Furthermore, he affirms that analysing the gaze in mainstream cinema is a complex process. Neale opened a new debate arguing that the characterisation of the male was not simple and straightforward. Thus, masculinity, he claimed, required the same attention as femininity in

order to be properly understood and studied. Jill Nelmes in *Introduction to Film Studies* affirms that

> Neale's discussion of looking and spectacle further develops Mulvey's division of active male, who controls the look, and the object of the look, the passive female. Neale argues that male figures can be the subject of voyeuristic looking also. In male-centred genres such as war, action, westerns and gangster films there are binary oppositions in the form of opposing forces which struggle power and control. (2007: 240)

Michael Flood states that masculinity emerged as a field of interest in film studies with "the appearance of an influential collection of essays, *Screening the Male* edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark in 1993, swiftly followed by two edited by Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim, *You Tarzan* (1993) and *Me Jane* (1995), written by male and female academics respectively" (2007: 212). He continues to explain that

> [t]hese anthologies demonstrated the range and variety of masculinities occurring in both popular and 'art house' cinema and the necessity to subject textual scrutiny as even apparently straightforward, taken-for-granted images revealed a surprising complexity. In doing so, these essays broke with the assumptions of early feminist analysis that tended to conceive masculinity as monolithic and self-confident, by revealing masculinity to be performative (socially and culturally constructed), fragile and often neurotic or paranoid. They also revealed how closely studies of masculinity and stardom are interwoven as the bodies, looks, performances and personae of male stars are central to how masculinity is represented. (2007: 212)

In 1993 Yvonne Tasker published *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and The Action Cinema*, which focused on 1980s cinema and the study of the representation of masculinity. Sylvester Stallone as John Rambo, together with Arnold Schwarzenegger as Conan the Barbarian, became the American muscular icons during the last decades of the 1980s. As Tasker suggests,

> [t]hese two stars provided the most publicised, most visible image of the figure of the muscular male hero who had come to dominate the American action cinema of the 1980s. Many critics saw the success of Stallone and Schwarzenegger as a disturbing sign, signalling the evolution of a previously unseen cinematic articulation of masculinity. (1993: 1)

In her work Tasker analyses the evolution of cinema in the late 1980s. She argues that films such as *Aliens* (1986) or *Terminator 2* (1991) included powerful female roles, but the women they presented imitated the muscular role of man:

> These films reinscribe, in different ways, the female body in terms of masculinity. It is for this reason that I want to introduce the term 'musculinity'. 'Musculinity' indicates the extent to which a physical definition of masculinity in terms of a developed musculature is not limited to the male body within representation. (1993: 3)

Another relevant work worth mentioning here is *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (1994) by Susan Jeffords. As far as masculinity is concerned, Jeffords considers some differences in *The Terminator* (1984) and in *Terminator 2* (1991). In *Terminator 2*, she argues, the Terminator can be seen as the perfect father and saviour for John Connor and for the whole humanity. However, John Connor ends up being the central character in the story. He has the power to control the Terminator, he constantly claims that violence should be avoided and he finally outlives old traditional masculinity values embodied by the terminator melting in the fire. Jeffords states that

> *Terminator 2* may present John Connor as the savior of the human race, but John Connor is finally saving something else, something far more immediate than a mechanized future and something far more immediate than a mechanized killing machine. He is saving masculinity for itself, not only embodying the "new" future of masculinity but rescuing its past for revival. (1994:173)

Throughout the 1980s, muscles are symbols of strength, power and masculinity. There seems to be the need to bring to the extreme the traditional masculine body in the film narrative. However new masculine roles mushroomed in the Hollywood scene. In the late 1980s, films such as *Wall Street* (1987) show the harsh economic situation at that time and the consequent decline of man and masculinity. In the same vein, in the early 1990s, masculine roles in films – as in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) – became more humanised, and praised friendship and sensitive relationships between men. Similarly, *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is a revolutionary film where men are presented as real men with their weaknesses and strengths and with the power to mock themselves. Men are shown in awkward and embarrassing settings which are completely new for the spectator; Vincent Vega (John Travolta) going to the toilet became an iconic Tarantino scene, and not surprisingly, while in the toilet, Vincent reads a comic strip with the title *Modesty Blaise* by Peter O'Donnell, where the main protagonist is an exceptional female heroine.

Lee Clark Mitchell, in *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (1996), offers a new panorama where manhood presents all its splendour. She argues that action and war films were the most common scenes for men to develop their roles. However, Mitchell observes that the western

genre offers a new scenario to study man and masculinity: "the cowboy became the instrument-body upon which Westerns practiced their favorite tune – the construction of masculinity, the making of men, a process never straightforward or consistent." (1996: 27). The Western drops a hint on the problems of manhood. In fact, Westerns offer traditional, brave and strong masculine roles that rarely resemble how they really were. Mitchell explains that when a man is defeated in the Western,

> we find ourselves, male and female, identifying with the masculinizing process itself as one of American culture's most powerful (and powerfully constructed) imaginative constructions. For it is the Western hero – unlike the leading men in any other genre– who is placed before us precisely to be looked at. And in that long, oscillating look, we watch men still at work in the unfinished process of making themselves, even as we are encouraged to believe that manhood doesn't need to be made. (1996: 187)

It is necessary here to mention one of the most famous figures in the American Western genre: John Wayne. He was the masculine representation of rudeness and virility and he became an American icon, famous for his height, his look and his distinctive walk. His influence was so significant that its representation was transferred to war film narratives, especially World War II movies. Moreover, the John Wayne Syndrome[2] came into play to designate a masculine conduct and a set of traits that men possessed and which resembled the characteristics of the adored figure of John Wayne.

In the late 1990s, films started to offer the image of a new man, a somehow 'feminised' man which was often contrasted with the figure of the female character and whose traits were sometimes over-emphasised to such extreme that often escaped the limits of reality. This conception of the 1990s men became popularly known as the 'new man'. David Savran, in his work *Taking It Like a Man* (1998), explores the emergence of this new Hollywood hero in films during the 1990s that is often portrayed as androgynous and partially alienated from the John Wayne model, but always with a hint of traditional rugged manhood. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the muscled machine in *The Terminator* (1984), was challenged to star a good-natured kindergarten teacher in *Kindergarten Cop* (1990). According to Brenton Malin, author of *American Masculinity under Clinton* (2005),

> [e]ncouraged to move to a more domestic realm, the hard-bodied, hypermasculine hero experiences a sort of change identity, seemingly challenging its traditional role as muscular-powered warrior and possessor of the hardest bodied machismo of the 1980s. While these hard-bodied heroes seem to become "new men", their "old masculinity" never strays far from view, maintaining the sort of balanced, conflicted sensitivity mentioned

2 For more on the John Wayne Syndrome, see "At War With John Wayne: Masculinity, Violence, and the Vietnam War in Emily Mann's *Still Life*." (2007).

> above. Refusing to completely abandon this traditional masculinity, hypermasculine figures such as Steven Seagal, martial arts master of such action films as *Out for Justice* (1991), *Under Siege* (1992), *On Deadly Ground* (1994), and *Under Siege II: Dark Territory* (1995), embody 'tough" machismo at its fullest, Seagal's precision bone breaking exemplary of the stereotypical macho male. (30)

It is interesting to point out here that after the production of *Kindergarten Cop* in 1990, Schwarzenegger starred in *Terminator 2* (1991), a role that gave him international recognition and fame worldwide. Therefore, one can argue that both the traditional rugged masculinity and the new androgynous and sensitive role of man in films were coexisting and fighting to survive the new cinematic era. Brian Baker, author of *Masculinity in Fiction and Film* (2006), states that

> [t]he end of the nineteenth century, the 1950s and the 1990s have all witnessed a cultural discourse that represents hegemonic masculinity as somehow in decline, a symptom of a social and cultural body in crisis.[...] I will argue that the 1990s saw a revisiting of the masculinity issues of the 1950s to do with consumerism, the 'organization man', and 'emasculation'; and also a self-reflexive redeployment of crucial generic motifs. (65)

In the late 1990s a great variety of films offer a new vision of masculinity, a troubled man who needs to balance his problems as a father, a breadwinner and, at the same time, a sensitive man with his own problems and worries. Examples of these movies are, among others, *American Beauty* (1999), *Fight Club* (1999) and *American Psycho* (2000). These filmic texts show men trapped in some sort of crisis who feel forced to take action trying to climb up the steep slope that has doomed them into a masculine crisis. Both the unnamed narrator in *Fight Club* (Edward Norton) and Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale) in *American Psycho* opt to take shelter in violence to overcome their weaknesses as men. According to Tim Edwards in *Cultures of Masculinity* (2006), while both men perceive violence as a response to a crisis in American masculinity, where they really succeed is "in opening up a series of questions concerning the connections of masculinity and contemporary society and where they fail is in finding any more positive or satisfactory answers to these questions" (135). Therefore, both films offer a negative perception of the fall of the masculine hero into redemption and self-destruction. On the other hand, Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* presents a 'new man', Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), who narrates his life after his death. We soon discover that Lester is an unhappy man fighting against his mid-life crisis. However, as Edwards suggest, Lester's crisis "is still clearly resolved through the practices and politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, rather than through resorting to violence" (2006: 120).

In 2001, Peter Lehman publishes *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture,* a compilation of essays about masculinity in films which he describes as follows:

> Most of the essays in this collection deal with cultural texts that can only be understood within such troubling contexts of masculinity, or represent masculinity and male sexuality within cultures that embrace such troubling notions. Thus, at the end of one millennium and the beginning of another, masculinity remains a disturbingly complex and shifting category that the essays in this book help us to better understand. (2001: 6)

Lehman, a pioneer of masculinity and film studies, brings together different reflections on the mutant and pluralistic category of masculinity to offer a better and wider understanding of the men in both films and real life. Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River* (2003), Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003), Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) are all examples of films in which men and masculinity play a crucial role. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, films like these ones celebrate the plurality of masculinity and they often show the harsh reality of men who, until recently, had been pigeonholed as mere representation of the hegemonic way of being a man, a fact that will be seen through the analysis of the chosen corpus for this work.

CHAPTER 2
MASCULINITIES AND VIOLENCE

Violence and masculinities have always been strongly linked in the history of the United States. But, as Michael Kimmel suggests in *The Gendered Society* (2000), although studies on masculinity have been gaining importance over the last decades, there is still a lot of work to be done in order to understand the doomed relationship between violence and men (9). However, what is widely acknowledged is that violence plays a significant role in U.S. culture and society. Kimmel states that

> [t]he United States has a long and bloody history of specifically gendered violence, in which both individual men and Americans as a nation have demonstrated and proved manhood. It's not just our political and military leaders – although, as we have seen, they certainly have had their issues as well. […] Historians suggest that this particularly American, and particularly tragic, code of violence arrived in the eighteenth century, brought and developed by Scottish and Irish immigrants to the American south, where brawling, dueling, fighting, hunting and drinking became the means to express manhood. (2000: 252)

This chapter is an attempt to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between masculinities and violence, trying to provide socio-historical and cultural explanations of its origin. The first step will be to study the conceptualization(s) of violence; later moving to the relationship between masculinity and violence and its association with the culture of the United States. The last step will be to present a brief panorama of the history of masculinities and violence in American film. It will be argued that society in general has helped to reinforce, in a negative way, preconceived images of the link between masculinities and violence. Therefore, cultural products such as mainstream films, for instance, have influenced society to understand violence as an inherent trait of male power and dominance. But, due to their socio-cultural quality (as opposed to biological), in the same way that these associations were constructed, they can also be de-constructed and reformulated into something entirely new, as some alternative films suggest.

Conceptualisations of Violence

Violence is part of our lives, our society and our world, and although this may seem an essentialist affirmation, we do not have any reason to believe that we will be able to get rid of violence in the world in the near future. Every time we turn on the television, we listen to the radio or we play a video game the representation of violence starts. Moreover, apart from the presentation of violence that we encounter in the media or in popular culture, humans experience a high number of violent episodes during their everyday activity, such as when children suffer from bullying in schools or when women are victims of verbal abuse in the streets. However, although it is commonly thought

that humans possess a violent nature, this statement needs to be closely studied. Are we really prone to violent behaviour? Is violence an inherent trait of human beings?

The Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (VPA 2012). It is important to notice the use of 'intentional' when describing violence. As Yves Michaud states,

> [e]n casos muy extraños, la violencia es la expresión pura de una rebelión no premeditada: las personas estallan de cólera porque ya no pueden más, porque no tienen nada que perder o porque, repentinamente, les entra un ataque de pánico. […] Sin embargo, la mayoría de las veces la violencia es un instrumento cuya utilización está organizada, calculada, dominada y controlada. (1998: 10)

José Sanmartín, in *La Violencia y sus claves*, explains that human beings can be biologically aggressive, but it is culture that makes us peaceful or violent in the end:

> La cultura juega, pues, un papel fundamental en la configuración del ser humano como pacífico, un ser humano que, como cualquier otro animal, tiene una biología que le induce agresividad. Pero la cultura también puede hacer lo contrario e hipertrofiar la agresividad natural convirtiéndola en violencia. […] el ser humano es agresivo por naturaleza, pero pacífico o violento por cultura. (2000: 19)

Therefore, there is an urge here to distinguish between violence and aggressiveness. While violence is a product of culture, we could affirm that we are *naturally* aggressive. Sanmartín states that "violencia es, en definitiva, el resultado de la interacción entre la agresividad natural y la cultura" (2000: 24). Therefore, he argues that violence is a specifically human trait that entails intentional violent actions against other human beings. Elaborating on this idea from a gender perspective, Alicia Molina in "La violencia de género" states that despite the fact that humans are biologically predisposed to aggressive behaviour, this does not justify violent action:

> el hecho de que exista un componente innato para la conducta agresiva, no quiere decir que esté justificado un comportamiento violento. Es más, la biología puede explicar ciertos comportamientos violentos muy puntuales, pero la causa de la mayor parte de la violencia que vivimos en nuestra sociedad no hay que buscarla en la biología, sino en la cultura y la educación. (2002: 37)

As Xesús Jares points out still on this point, "la agresividad forma parte de la conducta humana, no negativa en sí misma sino positiva y necesaria como fuerza para la autoafirmación,

física y psíquica, del individuo, y especialmente determinada por los procesos culturales de socialización" (2006: 107). Thus, it is culture that can affect our aggressiveness and promote the use of violence with specific aims. However, in the same way, culture is also the responsible for our control over our own actions, helping most people to behave in a non-violent way.

It is time now to develop this topic further in relation to the concept of masculinity/ies that we have been applying in this dissertation: although statistics show that violence is primarily a male issue – in the United States, 90 per cent of crimes are committed by men – some scholars are reluctant to openly state the relationship between masculinity and violence. Nowadays one thing is clear, and as seen above, most researchers agree on it in this respect: men (like all human beings) are not biologically determined to behave violently. However, throughout the past years, there have been different opinions about this issue.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, it was Nancy Chodorow, in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (1989), who argued that men feel the need to become independent of their mothers so as to define themselves, confirming their masculinity. In fact, boys and girls experience mothering in a completely different way:

> It seems likely that from their children's earliest childhood, mothers and women tend to identify more with daughters and to help them to differentiate less, and that processes of separation and individuation are made more difficult for girls. On the other hand, a mother tends to identify less with her son, and to push him toward differentiation and the taking on of a male role unsuitable to his age, and undesirable at any age in his relationship to her. For boys and girls, the quality of the pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother differs. (50)

Therefore, men's struggle to define themselves as independent masculine beings becomes determinant. In order to construct their masculinity, men constantly need to prove that they are different from women. In this context, violence can be understood as an instrument through which men can prove their power and maleness. According to Gavon Titley in *Youth Work with Boys and Young Men as a Means to Prevent Violence in Everyday Life*, "in the context of masculinity, violence is often seen as empowering"; and he goes on to affirm that "violence involves not just physical but psychological survival, and where opportunities are lacking, self-respect can be temporarily regained through power over someone else" (2003: 25).

From an anthropological perspective, it is vital to highlight David Gilmore's research on masculinity and violence, where he points out that all over the world men undergo violent tests to prove their manhood (1990: 24). Today ancient rites of passages are almost extinct. However, there are still some tribes such as the Mandan, a Native American tribe from North Dakota, who still perform violent ceremonies for boys to become men. Nevertheless, contemporary America, for

instance, lacks clear and defined cultural transitions for boys to attain manliness. There is not one established and fixed way to become a man, but many. When asking a man for his rite of passage we can expect answers such as: "When you have sex for the first time", "when you get your driving licence", etc., but the truth is that still nowadays men need violence to prove their virility. Every now and then we hear the news about young boys all over the world consuming alcohol and performing violence in the streets, destroying windows and burning cars. Is rioting becoming a modern rite of passage? We do not have to forget the tragic episode of *The Dark Night Rises* shooting near Denver, Colorado, which took place in July 2012, a clear example of horrendous violence performed by the 24-year-old James Holmes. Moreover, the Boston Marathon bombing on April 15, 2013, is another example of tremendous violence. Masculine violent acts that could be studied as a possible rite of passage.

When describing some social customs, Gilmore points out that the "restraint on violence is always based on the capacity for violence, so that reputation is vital" (1990: 45). Moreover, he argues that whereas it is widely acknowledged that a girl becomes a woman when she goes through her first menstruation, boys lack this sort of bodily rite of passage so as to become men. Manhood needs to be culturally attained, and it is here that violence comes into play. Nevertheless, violence in men depends on a variety of factors such as the place where they were born and raised, race, age or class. Gilmore points out that some men belong to non-violent societies, a fact which takes to pieces the statement that all men are violent. He explains, for instance, that "the Semai are among the most unaggressive and retiring people on the face of the earth – a remarkable quality that has given rise to a virtual industry of scholarly speculation about whether they have aggressive impulses at all" (1990: 210).

It is widely believed that men are more violent than women, and many seem to think that they are doomed to fight in war, rape and destroy their enemies. The explanation to this violent nature is usually biological: testosterone. Nevertheless, as Connell explains in *The Men and the Boys*,

> [c]areful examination of the evidence shows that this biological essentialism is not credible. Testosterone levels for instance, far from being a clearcut source of dominance and aggression in society, are as likely to be the consequence of social relations. Cross-cultural studies of masculinities reveal a diversity that is impossible to reconcile with a biologically fixed master pattern of masculinity. (2000: 215)

Connell goes on explaining that society tends to portray all men as violent, but we should not forget that

> [w]hen we speak statistically of 'men' having higher rates of violence than women, we must not slide to the inference that therefore all men are violent. Almost all soldiers are men, but most men are not soldiers. Though most killers are men, most men never kill or even commit assault. Though an appalling number of men do rape, most men do not. It is a fact of great importance, both theoretically and practically, that there are many non-violent men in the world. (2000: 215)

Even though high levels of testosterone may favour violent behaviour, they do not cause violence. In this sense, Kimmel affirms that

> by itself the biological evidence is unconvincing. While testosterone is associated with aggression, it does not cause the aggression but only facilitates an aggressiveness that is already present. (It does nothing for nonaggressive males, for example.) Nor does the causal arrow always point from hormone to behaviour. Winners in athletic competition experience increased testosterone levels after they win. Violence causes increased testosterone levels; hormonal increases cause violence. Nor does testosterone cause violence against those who are significantly higher on the dominance ladder. (2000: 244)

In the same line of thought, Cristina Alsina and Laura Borràs, in "Masculinidad y violencia", argue that the notion of masculinity is a stereotypical construction of which violence is a key element:

> uno de los signos constitutivos de la masculinidad es, sin duda, la violencia, la fuerza, el control, el dominio, la agresividad, la agresión. Todos estos parámetros se han configurado como exigencias de la virilidad. La violencia, la doctrina viril de la consecución, la lógica del dominio (de la cual hemos hallado múltiples muestras en la filosofía occidental de Platón y Nietzsche, pasando por Hegel) es un discurso de poder que constituye al hombre como sujeto y se comporta como la base de la masculinidad desde tiempos inmemoriales. (2000: 85)

Yet it seems certain that violence is recognised as a male phenomenon. Christopher B. Strain affirms that "[m]en top all major crime indexes; it is men who fill prisons. Domestic violence is overwhelmingly committed by husbands against wives; criminal rape, which shades into sexual intercourse under pressure, is also overwhelmingly committed by men" (2010: 15). One needs to clarify that while not all men commit violent crimes, "most violent acts occur at the hands of men" (Strain 2010: 15). This is why it is important that we learn the traditional masculinity traits that promote violence so as to understand the link between this gender construction and violent behaviour.

Violence can be represented in different environments and in many forms. One can speak of violence among the youth, violence against partners and mates, violence and abandonment of

children, violence against elderly people, sexual violence, self-inflicted violence, media violence, etc. However, according to Peter Iadicola and Anson Shupe in *Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom* (2013), many forms of violence overlap three main contexts: the interpersonal, the institutional and the structural. Taking this into account, we can speak of three main types of violence, namely interpersonal violence, institutional violence and structural violence. *Interpersonal violence* needs to be understood as violence between individuals, which is not related to any social institution. This type of violence occurs between people acting outside the prefixed boundaries of social institutions, such as the assault in a bar or a gang fight. On the other hand, we need to talk about *institutional violence.* This type of violence appears when the act of aggression is supported by the members of an institution, for example violence promoted by sects or organisations, etc: the hunting of witches, religious terrorism, cultism, etc. Institutional violence is violence performed by people who act according to the roles that are fixed in an institutional context. Gregg Barak in *Violence and Nonviolence* states that

> [l]ike interpersonal forms of violence, institutional forms include physically or emotionally abusive acts. However, institutional forms of violence are usually, but not always, impersonal: that is to say, almost any person from the designated group of victims will do. Moreover, abuses or assaults that are practiced by corporate bodies – groups, organizations, or even a single individual on behalf of others – include those forms of violence that over time have become "institutionalized," such as war, racism, sexism, terrorism, and so on. (2003: 77)

Finally, *structural violence* refers to those who fight against social structures that promote suffering through exploitation or intolerance over others: "violence that occurs in the context of establishing, maintaining, extending, reducing or as consequence of the hierarchical ordering of categories of people in a society" (Barak 2003: 31). Barak defines structural violence as the most basic or fundamental form of violence:

> [i]t is expressive of the conditions of society, the structures of social order, and the institutional arrangements of power that reproduce mass violations of personhood 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Such violence is accomplished in part through "policies" of informal and formal denial of civil, criminal, and basic human rights for all people. […] Structural violence refers to the established patterns of organized society that have been institutionalized – rationalized and sanctioned – yet result in systematic harm to millions of victims annually, including, disproportionately, members of the marginal classes of society. (2003: 113)

This type of violence is affected by authority and power, since it is power that rules and controls others. As reported by Iadicola and Shupe, "[t]he active subjugation and enslavement of

native populations on contact by Christopher Columbus and his soldiers is an example of structural violence" (2013: 35). Other instances of structural violence could be the difference in life expectancy depending on where a person is born. If you are from Botswana, for instance, your quality of life is likely to be worse than in the United States. This case of structural violence may result less understandable. However, as Iadicola and Shupe clarify, structural violence "is also violence when harmful action is an outcome of the hierarchical ordering of categories of people" (2013: 35).

The division of violence into three main spheres is not enough for Iadicola and Shupe, since they talk about the intersection of the spheres of violence: "Although we can think of spheres as conceptually distinct, in reality there is a great deal of overlap between them" (2013: 36). One needs to have into consideration other subtypes of violence. Such is the case of *institutional structural violence*, *interpersonal structural violence*, *interpersonal institutional violence*. However, in my analysis I am going to concentrate on their three wider categories of violence: interpersonal, institutional and structural violence, although another type of violence will be examined, the *heroic violence* (Cawelti 2004), due to its relevance in the world of film.

Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) by Steven Spielberg, can be read as an example of a heroic violent man. Miller uses violence in order to regain his strength and masculinity. Miller's fears are made evident with his shaking hands and distressed behaviour; he seems to have been consumed by more than a year of suffering and pain in the Second World War. Therefore, he wholeheartedly desires to start the mission of saving Private Ryan no matter how many violent acts required. Heroic violence is widely perceived as a moral necessity which often ends up with heroic deeds and heroic violent acts. John Cawelti explains that "the treatment of heroic violence as morally justified has been almost inevitable accompanied of stories of heroic adventure since the epics of Homer" (2004: 161). In most stories the real hero is the one that is ready to risk his life and to commit a violent act, as Cawelti states: "To have a truly splendid hero we must have a man who faces the ultimate challenge of life and death and emerges triumphant" (2004: 161). Therefore, my aim here will be to examine into U.S. culture through two American films that deal with violence and try to find an interpretation to the apparently morally justified heroic violence in them. But, before that, and following the classification of interpersonal, institutional and structural violence, I will look into the masculine roles in both films trying to decipher their meaning and understand their purpose and effect when it comes to the relationship between violence and masculinity.

Masculinities, Violence, and U.S. Culture

As far as violence in the United States is concerned, facts talk by themselves. Violence rates are by far higher than in other industrialised countries. Michael Kimmel in *The Gendered Society* (2000) claimed that back in 1992 the United States had the highest homicide rate, which was ten times higher than Italy, for instance (246). In fact, eleven years later, Christopher B. Strain still affirmed that

> [i]mages of violence are numbingly customary in this society – difficult, in fact, to escape. We get a steady dose of violence in the local newspaper, in the theater, and online. It is a staple ingredient in television programming. It laces our news, and we often seek it in our sports and entertainment. People living in the United States are surrounded by violence, whether random or intentional, real or simulated, serious or 'fun'. Perhaps the familiarity of such images has desensitized us, making it easy to take such violence for granted. (2010: 8)

Violence seems to be the American way. Everyday a U.S. citizen encounters violent episodes in sports, films, schools, at home, or in the news. Sports such as football, hockey and wrestling, are part of the American identity and they clearly represent violent acts that people enjoy watching. *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), directed by Clint Eastwood, *The Wrestler* (2008), by Darren Aronofski, and *Warrior* (2011), by Gavin O'Connor, are examples of North American films which combine sport, violence and issues of masculinity. George Gerbner, the founder of the cultivation theory, studied American culture and the effects of television on society. He defended the idea that television seriously affects people's social life, since it cultivates a great variety of ideologies and behavioural conducts. Gerbner is widely known for his calculation about an American child having witnessed 8,000 murders on television by the age of twelve (in Stossel 1997).

The American people seem to accept violence as part of their culture, to the extent that citizens who situate themselves politically against war, for instance, are prone to be accused of being unpatriotic. This assimilation of violence may have its origins in the colonial period, when it was deemed right to kill the 'other' (the Native Americans, for example) in order to conquer the land. Today, the American people do not colonise land in the same traditional way, but the U.S. does fight for other goods such as oil, for example, and they do it using violence and authority, crushing any obstacle they meet in their way. A popular film that contains violence in a historical context is *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), directed by Michael Mann, set on the American-Canadian frontier during the French and Indian War. *Syriana* (2005), by Stephen Gaghan, on the other hand, shows how the oil industry can destroy or deeply affect the lives of the people who are involved in it. This

film is about politics, corruption and economic interests – loaded with violent images and violent language. The film is an example of how violence is still present in today's political affairs.

Although Americans seem to live symbiotically with violence, there is not enough evidence to believe that being in constant contact with the phenomenon makes them more violent. Many peaceful people play violent video games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, *Madworld* or *Silent Hill*, for example. Moreover, most of us watch violent action films, thrillers and war stories, and once they finish we do not feel the urge to hurt anybody. So, why is violence so linked to the American way of life and culture?

Christopher Waldrep and Michael Bellesiles in *Documenting American Violence: A Sourcebook* (2006), reflect on the complexity of violence and the difficulties to limit its boundaries:

> Violence is incoherent. It can seem, and often is, random, chaotic, anarchic. It takes many forms: a duel, a brawl, a shooting, a war, a feud, a riot. Some Americans consider abortion a form of violence, while others feel that preventing a desired abortion is violence. Has an industrial employee injured by unsafe machinery experienced violence? What about the victims of a drunken driver? When does intimidation become violence? The definition itself remains elusive, describing behaviour that is often ephemeral. (2006: 3)

However, as we have been saying, violence in the general sense needs to be understood as the intentional harm of other human beings. And, unfortunately, violence has always been present in the American history; episodes such as the European colonisation, slavery or the Civil War. Waldrep and Bellesiles argue that

> Americans allegedly have a murderous rage that comes from the ground up and not the top down. Such for instance, was the case with lynching, which supposedly sprang from a force too powerful to control, the sovereign will of the public. Nazi Germany was certainly more violent than the United States, but the Holocaust emerged from an ideologically driven government program. (2006: 4)

The same can be applied to slavery, since the violence and will to support slavery came from ordinary people. Nevertheless, violence is not just an act of individuals. Throughout history, Americans have created organisations which foster violence against minority groups, religion or race such as the Ku Klux Klan. In spite of the fact that violence has always been a latent problem in the United States, it has not been until recently that violence has moved to the limelight and become a major field of study. Moreover, the above mentioned episodes of violence affect the public sphere, and we do not have to forget that many other types of violence take place without being so obvious. Again Waldrep and Bellesiles explain that

> [v]iolence against women seems a constant, offering little evidence of the change over time that historians study. Nonetheless, surely few can deny that gendered violence is a major component of the American experience, and an ugly part of the American history. The ignorance of hidden forms of violence affects the lives of thousands of people every year. Societies that turn a blind eye to some forms of violence give silent approval to its continuance, as American whites once did to the racial terrorism exerted to keep African Americans in a subservient status. (2006: 9)

Violence in the United States, as in the entire world, is cruel and devastating. Thus, it is important that Americans understand and remember the historical causes and roots of violence so as to have a better grasp of American violence nowadays. As far as structural violence is concerned, it is vital to remember that this phenomenon is related to economic and political structures and their effect on human welfare. Structural violence is also an alarming problem in the United States. Gendered violence is perhaps one of the most evident instances of violence that happens behind closed doors, but is part of a macro-structure (patriarchy, in this case). Laura L. O'Toole and Jessica R. Schiffman in *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* explain that

> [m]uch gender violence takes place in the context of sexual relationships; thus, it is important to understand the social construction of dominant sexual practices. Infusing sexual relations with violence is not by any means limited to the United States. Edwin Schur (1988) suggests, however, that globally sex has been increasingly 'Americanized,' taking on distinct cultural forms as sexual meanings emerge in conjunction with gender and economic inequality, consumerism, and the larger U.S. culture of violence. (1997: 70)

It is true that when people do not have resources and the possibility to live a decent life, violence is likely to come into play. Structural violence is said to be invisible and it normally occurs when people are disfavoured by unfair traditions. While homicides, for example, are very visible in the American society as part of an unfortunately common dynamic of interpersonal violence, structural violence remains somehow camouflaged within social frames and powerful institutions. Inequality when it comes to education, welfare, political power, etc. represent forms of structural violence. Capitalism in the United States brings about an inequality that leads society to an atmosphere of oppression, exploitation and humiliation. Under capitalism people's quality of life is diminished. Human beings are seen as productive items, as workers, pieces of machinery that are just valuable for providing basic needs such as food and housing to others. In the U.S., people lacking health insurance cannot have the benefits of health care; and this is just an instance of violence in a capitalist world, and it is killing people.

No doubt the United States is a violent country. And it does not come as a surprise to find people living with extra security measures in their homes, museums, airports, and with guns for

self-defense and protection. Violence is in the news, in magazines, everywhere. Crime may be decreasing in the United States but people are still afraid, always alert to possible danger. But still with hope people wonder what can be done to stop this state of madness. How can violence be defeated? And while asking this question one cannot avoid remembering the huge impact of violence in the world. Violence exists, this is a fact, but the only way we can defeat it is trying to understand its cause, its origins and meaning.

Masculinities and Violence in American Film

Violence has always been present in American cinema. Long ago, when films had not come into existence – the first movie ever made, *Horse in Motion* by Eadweard Muybridge, dates back from 1878 – people already enjoyed tales of terror and violence; even before the publication of some of Edgar Allan Poe's works. People liked murder, death and destruction, as seen in tales such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) or "The Black Cat" (1843). Nowadays, violence is deeply rooted in the American culture and it is extremely popular in novels, magazines, video games, films and in other cultural manifestations. One of the most popular video games in the United States is *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010), a first-person shooter game set in the World War II and Cold War. In the movies *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) and *Kill Bill Vol. 2* (2004), directed by Quentin Tarantino, the bride, Uma Thurman, has one main goal: the brutal assassination of all the team that betrayed her and killed the baby she had inside. *Natural Born Killers* (1994) by Oliver Stone is a hyper-violent film where a couple feels a psychopathic urge to kill and their acts are inexplicably celebrated by the media. The recently released film *Only God Forgives* (2013) by Nicolas Winding Refn has been criticised for being extremely violent, a fact that has been corroborated by the accounts of some people who were forced to walk out from the cinema in disgust.

What seems to be true is that audiences enjoy watching violence. Jeffrey H. Goldstein points out that people "voluntarily expose themselves to, and often search out, images of violence. No one, with the possible exception of subjects in a social-psychology experiment, is forced to watch violent films or television programs" (1998: 2). However, he also suggests that the reason why people enjoy seeing violence in films is because of the suspension of disbelief, "the eagerness to pretend may be a requirement for the enjoyment of violent entertainment" (Goldstein 1998: 3). Nevertheless, the audience is aware that they are watching a fictional violent film – they are aware of the camera, the actors and actresses, the performances, the music and the special effects.

Quentin Tarantino, director of well-known films such as *Death Proof* (2007) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) uses violence to evoke humorous episodes. There is a very popular comic scene in *Pulp Fiction* (1994), for example, when Jules and Vincent accidentally shoot the backseat passenger in their car. The scene is violent, but people cannot help laughing after watching the violent shocking event. Tarantino takes violence to the extreme so as to diminish its harsh impact on viewers. In an interview for *The Telegraph* Tarantino affirmed that extreme violence was the best way to control the emotions of audiences.

> I feel like a conductor and the audience's feelings are my instruments. I will be like, 'Laugh, laugh, now be horrified'. When someone does that to me I've had a good time at the movies […]. If a guy gets shot in the stomach and he's bleeding like a stuck pig then that's what I want to see – not a man with a stomach ache and a little red dot on his belly. (Telegraph 2010)

Extreme violence is used in most of his films, as for example in the aforementioned *Kill Bill* series (2003, 2004), where blood sprays out when limbs and heads are cut off. Nowadays, violence in films does not come as a surprise; we are used to it and seem to find some kind of pleasure in the process of witnessing it. However, there are experts who think that violence in movies can have a mimetic effect on viewers – people feeling an urge to act violently after watching a violent film. Others believe that violence in films is better than violence in real life, and that it can have a positive cathartic effect on viewers. Sanmartín states that

> [h]ay científicos que opinan que, viendo violencia – en el cuadrilátero de boxeo, en el campo de deportes, en la televisión, etc. –, purificamos nuestra violencia innata. Es lo que defienden los psicoanalistas con su teoría de la catarsis.
>
> Yo no soy innatista en este sentido. Como vengo diciendo desde las primeras líneas de este libro, para mí la violencia es el resultado de la interacción entre factores culturales y nuestra agresividad, que sí que es innata. No comparto, pues, las posiciones psicoanalíticas. Pero es que, además, es altamente dudoso que la visión de espectáculos violentos nos purifique y libere de nuestra propia pulsión violenta; lo más probable es que, por el contrario, incremente nuestras actitudes y comportamientos violentos tal y como sustentan, por ejemplo, los partidarios de teorías como la del aprendizaje social.
>
> Para estos últimos, la violencia se aprende, so sólo viendo violencia real, sino observando violencia filmada. (2000:105)

It is evident that violence in movies, just like explicit sex for instance, has evolved at a very high speed in the past decades. However, let us now concentrate on some of the film productions of the second half of the 20th century about violence and masculinity to finish with the cult production

Fight Club (1999) by David Fincher, which is a key production when dealing with men and violence, as we have said. Then, we will move to the 21st century so as to provide a panorama of violent films that paved the way for the most recent productions to emerge.

It is interesting to notice that films from the 1940s (the classical period of Hollywood), for example, did not include violence as they do nowadays. Stephen Prince in *Screening Violence* explains that

> [a]lthough movie violence has a long history, in contrast with today's films, screen violence in earlier periods was more genteel and indirect. From the 1930, when it was formulated, until the 1960s, Hollywood's Production Code regulated all aspects of screen content, with an elaborate list of rules outlining what was permissible to show and what was not. These regulations placed great constraints on filmmakers and helped to prevent the emergence of ultraviolence in American films during these earlier periods. (2000: 2)

In the 1950s, some of the most representative films include *12 Angry Men* (1957) by Sidney Lumet and *Touch of Evil* (1959) by Orson Welles. They centred on dominant violent men and their role as heroes. Moreover, male protagonists were often portrayed as a source of protection for women. The 1950s were not an era of masculinity in crisis, but a period with fixed feminine and masculine roles. Talking about masculine models of that time, it is crucial to mention the figure of John Wayne. John Wayne was the fictitious name of Marion Mitchell Morrison, who became an American icon and a model of tough masculinity because of his gestures, way of talking and walking in Western films, as we have explained.

Lawrence of Arabia (1962) by David Lean and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick are crucial films to understand masculinity in the 1960s. In both productions violence serves as a means to impose power over others. Kubrick, for instance, is well known for experimenting with the concept of violence. In *2001: A Space Odyssey* violence for primates is vital; for humans, on the contrary, it is a luxury just shared by some mentally disturbed people or the most powerful ones. Yet, the truth is that films from the 1960s do not differ greatly from the ones from the 1950s; however, it is worth mentioning here that some women roles began to be more assertive and strong but still far less relevant than male characters. It is interesting to mention the film *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and the portrayal of Bonnie Parker in the female (violent) lead role.

The 1970s offered audiences two main tendencies: the first one included innovative feminine roles such as the one in *Alien* (1979) by Ridley Scott, and her heroine Ripley. But other blockbuster films such as *The Godfather* (1972) by Francis Ford Coppola and *Superman* (1978) by Richard Donner continued with the model of masculinity and violence portrayed in the previous

decades. *Apocalypse Now* (1979), also by Coppola, is worth mentioning here. This is a movie which portrays violence as a theme, a message through which the director shows the crudity of that time, the Vietnam War.

The 1980s offered even stronger roles of women such as in *The Terminator* (1984) by James Cameron, in which Sarah Connor is portrayed as capable of harsh violence so as to protect her son. However, the heroic male role still dominated the industry, with titles like *Rambo* (1982) by Ted Kotcheff, whose popularity was so high that two more films completed the saga (1985, 1988).

After this quick glance at some the most popular films till the 1980s, it is time to talk about the productions of the 1990s. David Gauntlett in *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction* (2008) affirms that

> [l]ooking through the list of movies of the past ten years or so, we can find examples of standard male action figures doing pretty much the same old thing: from *The Rock* (1996) and *Air Force One* (1997) to *Batman Begins* (2005), *Shooter* (2007), and *Die Hard 4.0* (entitled *Live Free* or *Die Hard* in the US) (2007). The difference with some 1980s action movies may be that the male hero is today more cynical, weary, and perhaps aware that violence may not be the solution to everything. (2008: 74)

Nevertheless, Gauntlett suggests that there are other films from this period which show a more balanced connection between the male and the female heroic roles and their relationship with violence, such as *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) by Roger Spottiswoode and *The Matrix* (1999), by Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski. Although it is true that there were still more male roles on the screen, there is no denying that the role of the female hero had already made an important step forwards at that time. Women started to be presented as true heroines with her feminine traits as weapons. The female protagonist of *Matrix*, for instance, is a strong woman who is not scared of showing her emotions, but at the same time she is as powerful as men and a memorable heroine. However, as it has been previously suggested, the movie *par excellence* when it comes to the portrayal of male violence at the turn of the last century is *Fight Club* (1999). David Fincher marked a turning point with a product that embraces violence as a vital part of the postmodern American culture. What is more important here is to highlight the huge impact that the film has had on the North American society and the world in general. An excellent resource to prove the impact of the film on its audience is having a look at the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) website. By June 2013, the film, with 744,689 votes, occupies position 10 in the users' ranking of the best 250 films in the history of cinema. *Fight Club* offers a wide panorama of the representation of masculinity in the modern American Western society. It also deals with the issue of masculinity in

crisis at the end of the 20th century and the effects of capitalism in the modern world. This masterpiece can be read as the peephole through which Fincher forced us to look so as to have a better understanding of the connection between masculinity and American society[3].

In the 21st century, American films and violence continue to maintain their close relationship. However, some Hollywood films seem to have been moving away from the absolute portrayal of the violent hyper-masculine man. Let us mention here Peter Parker in the *Spiderman* saga (2002, 2004, 2007, 2012) and his portrayal as an antithesis of the classic masculinity. He is depicted as the perfect grandson, a studious innocent boy. Spiderman is his *alter ego*, a man who fights evil; but he cannot be compared to other hyper-virile heroes such as Rambo. According to Richard J. Gray and Betty Kaklamanidou in *The 21st Century Superhero: Essays on Gender, Genre and Globalization in Film*, there is something new when it comes to the portrayal of the masculine hero in films and their use of violence. They state that

> [t]he first decade of the new millennium will certainly be remembered for many things: The 9/11 attacks, the War on Terror, the first African-American in the White House, natural disasters, the fear of a long-term global financial crisis, the birth of You Tube, and the widespread use of internet social networks which have changed the way that people communicate with each other. However, for the Hollywood film industry, it will also be remembered as the "superhero" decade. Never before in the history of cinema have so many "spectacular narratives" – to borrow Geoff King's term – been released and met with unprecedented box-office success. From *The X-Men* (2000) to *Kick-Ass* (2010), more than thirty superhero films from Marvel, DC, and Dark House Comics were adapted for the silver screen. (2011: 1)

The concept of 'hero' gained importance after the 9/11 attacks, as Susan Faludi has explored in her essay *The Terror Dream. Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (2007), mentioned in chapter 1. Hollywood became an industry that could provide hope, or at least a few hours of optimism and confidence, for the devastated population in the United States after the terrorist attacks. Christopher Nolan knew how to take profit of this glorification of the heroic adventure with the production of the Batman trilogy: *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and the most recent *The Dark knight Rises* (2012). The saga centres on Bruce Wayne, a multimillionaire who moonlights as Batman, a superhero that fights evil in Gotham City. A noteworthy fact is that contrary to *Spiderman* and other films that moved away from the portrayal of a classic hyper-masculine hero, the character of *Batman* can be read as exaltation of it. Nevertheless, one could argue that violence in superhero films from Marvel, DC, and Dark House Comics is light-hearted. Although there is heavy action violence, films such as *Batman*, *Spiderman* or *Hulk* are light in

3 For more on *Fight Club*, see "Diagnosing Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*" (2005) and "The Fiction of Self-destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist" (2008).

blood and offensive scenes, especially when compared with productions like *Saw* (2004) by James Wan, which proves how effective harsh and explicit violence is when it comes to attracting people's attention. Some directors took profit from the improvement of special effects and cinematic techniques of the 21st century so as to include realistic violence in their movies. In *Saw,* violence is taken to the extreme, it is made consumable and turned into a commodity. Brutal and bloody violence in the first film of the saga is what made audiences crave for more new sequels.

It could be reasonably contented, however, that violence in films such as *Saw* or *Inglourious Basterds* by Quentin Tarantino, although explicit, is also light-hearted. Since it is taken to the extreme, the audience is always conscious that violence is an aesthetic device to entertain the public, sometimes with a few strokes of humour. Besides, the heroic element in this type of films is still present. In *Inglourious Basterds* the Jewish commando, with Lt. Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) as the leader, is portrayed as a heroic and violent gang whose main aim is to annihilate the Nazis. In other productions, however, such as *A History of Violence* (2005) by David Cronenberg and *Drive* (2011), directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, violence is unpalatable, bitter and sometimes offensive. These two titles are the ones chosen as corpus to be analysed in my study of the representation of masculinity and violence in the 21st century.

Both in *A History of Violence* and *Drive* aggression is disturbing and seems to have a major role. In these two films the pace is slow, music is harmonious and the two main characters are presented as caring men who need affection and the love of a family, which makes the violent phenomenon even more outstanding when it takes place. *Drive* is presented as a film with an innovative style, as a fairy tale, a story of a mystical man that would do anything to help his beloved new acquaintance and neighbour. Maybe this is the reason why violence, once in scene, turns up to be extremely shocking and provocative. Moreoever, heroism in *A History of Violence* and *Drive* is also worth mentioning. In *A History of Violence*, Tom Stall is first depicted as a weak and soft man, a loving father and husband. However, he later becomes the undeniable hero in town after killing two men who were causing big trouble in his restaurant at closing time. In *Drive*, the unnamed Driver seems to rediscover himself into a heroic being as a consequence of taking care of Irene and her son. His heroic impulses could be read as some sort of motivation for his violent actions.

CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE AND MASCULITY IN *A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE* AND *DRIVE*

David Cronenberg is the director of *A History of Violence* (2005). Cronenberg was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1943. He graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in Literature. In his first period as a director he examined the body horror or venereal horror genre, of which he is said to be one of the originators. The body horror genre is a style that deals with people's fears of body mutation and disease. Some important films from this period of his career are *Shivers* (1975) or *The Fly* (1986). With *Dead Ringers* (1988) and *Naked Lunch* (1991), Cronenberg got international acclaim; he started the psychological exploration of the mind, moving away from the horror genre. Other important productions are *Crash* (1996) and *eXistenZ* (1999), both of which received positive criticism at the Cannes and Berlin Film Festivals. One of his recent productions is *A History of Violence* (2005) in which Cronenberg favours a more psychological exploration of human contradictions and eccentricities. His last films are *Eastern Promises* (2007), *A Dangerous Method* (2011) and *Cosmopolis* (2012).

A History of Violence, an adaptation of the graphic novel of the same name published in 1997 by John Wagner and Vince Locke, centres on Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen), a man who lives in a quiet town in Indiana with his wife Edie (Maria Bello) and their two children. Their lives change when Tom is forced to act in self-defence using violence against two robbers who are about to kill the waitress that works at his diner. From that moment on, the life of his family is turned upside down. Tom is portrayed as a local hero by the media, and he is soon visited by Carl Fogarty (Ed Harris), who claims that Tom is really named Joey Cusack and is a gangster who used to work with him in Philadelphia.

Cronenberg's adaptation is not faithful to the original source. It is true that the diner scene, which is key to understand Tom's change and his past, is identical in both texts. However, the rest of the film is very different. In the graphic novel the focus of attention is based on Tom's falling out with the gangster past, while the film makes a brief allusion to it and centres on Tom's evolution after the diner episode. The film was acclaimed by the critics. It was nominated for different awards and it won the Danish Film Critics Association award for the best American Picture, among others. According to Manohla Dargis in *The New York Times*,

> [a] masterpiece of indirection and pure visceral thrills, David Cronenberg's latest mindblower, "A History of Violence," is the feel-good, feel-bad movie of the year. The story of a seemingly average American family almost undone by cataclysmic violence, the film takes place in a surreal and mercilessly brutal land, Anytown, U.S.A., that has been repeatedly soaked in blood only to be repeatedly washed clean. The great kick of the movie – or rather, its great kick in the gut – comes from Mr. Cronenberg's refusal to let us indulge in movie violence without paying a price. The man wants to make us suffer, exquisitely. (2005)

Cronenberg depicts violence in a cruel and devastating way. Away from subtle portrayals of violence there is a lot of blood spillage in the film; violence is very graphic. The director explains that violence in the film focuses on the human body. In his own words, violence

> has an impact because it comes only at moments. It's not because I have this theory of cinema and violence that I've imposed on the movie. It comes from the movie. It comes from certain characters. Where did they learn to be violent, and what does the violence mean to them? In this case, they learned it on the streets, and what it means to them is business — if you have to kill someone, you do it and you move on to the next thing. It's not martial arts, and it's not even sadistic pleasure, it's just business, and that gave me the key to the tone of the violence of the movie.
>
> And even though the violence seems to be justified, the human body doesn't know whether the violence visited on it was justified. The results are the same. And to me, that's what violence is really about – the human body. That's the violence we worry about the very most. There's cars crashing and buildings falling down, but really, if there's no damage to the human body it's still not what we worry about. So that was my other approach. It's all very body oriented, very intimate. (in Martin 2005)

In turn, the film *Drive* (2011) is Nicolas Winding Refn's adaptation of James Sallis' novel of the same title, published in 2005. Writer, director and producer Nicolas Winding Refn was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1970. He moved to New York with his family at the age of eight. At 24 he initiated his career as a director with the film *Pusher* (1996), which gained him international acclaim. He is also the director of movies such as *Bronson* (2008) or *Valhalla Ring* (2009), both of them rated as violent, with disturbing content and language. After the success of *Drive* he announced two new productions: *Only God Forgives* (2013) – starring his fetish actor Ryan Gosling and which received bad reviews at the Cannes Film Festival 2013 due to its excess of violence and emptiness – and *Logan's Run.*

Drive is about an unnamed man (Ryan Gosling) who makes a living as a mechanic and as a movie stuntman, but who also moonlights as a driver for criminal businesses. The protagonist's life changes when he meets his new neighbour Irene (Carey Mulligan) and her son Benicio (Kaden Leo). Benicio's father, Standard Gabriel (Oscar Isaac), is released from prison and immediately asked to pay his debt to a gangster. The Driver will offer his help to Standard so as to aid, by extension, Irene and Benicio.

Refn's adaptation was widely accepted by the public and won him international recognition. It also helped to rediscover James Sallis as a novelist. In fact, he has become an influential writer in America and has recently written the sequel *Driven*. Sallis was very proud of Refn's work to adapt his book and when he was asked about it he explained:

> I think it's a great movie, one that will be talked about and referenced for years. And I think what Nic [Winding Refn] has done is take my book, an homage to paperback novels of the '50s and '60s, and reimagined it into a film that pays homage to classic films of the '60s and '70s, translating my novelistic devices into an equivalent visual vocabulary. After seeing it I told my agent: You know, this is the movie I might have made, were I a filmmaker, with those tools, rather than a novelist, with mine. (The Daily Beast 2012)

With *Drive* Refn was nominated for different awards. Perhaps the most important one to mention is the Best Director award which Refn won in the Cannes Festival in 2011, where *Drive* was also nominated for the Palme d'Or. Todd Gilchrist, a film critic from *Indiewire*, when talking about the movie states that

> Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive* was one of last year's great success stories that somehow few people seemed to know about. Although it built buzz to a deafening crescendo in between its first appearance at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival and its theatrical release in September, most of the din came from within the industry, and even though its $70 million haul more than tripled the cost of making it, a less than $100 million film scarcely registers among folks looking for nothing short of a cinematic phenomenon. But as the year drew to a close, Refn's film gained a cache among critics and its modest but fervent audience that guaranteed it would be seen, appreciated, and most importantly, shared for years to come. (Gilchrist 2012)

Refn surprised the audience with his strongly visual, unique, and innovative style. *Drive*, in his own words, is 'like a Grimm fairytale', since "[y]ou have the driver (Ryan Gosling) who's like a knight, the innocent maiden (Carey Mulligan), the evil king (Albert Brooks) and the dragon (Ron Perlman). They're all archetypes" (in Nissim 2011). The film can be read as modern fairy tale, far from the world of dreams and imagination since it allows the spectator to enter a world of violence, heroism and manhood.

As a first glimpse of Cronenberg's and Refn's films one could vaguely state that what both *A History of Violence* and *Drive* have in common is the director's choice to make violence a central element. What I am going to study is the intensity and effects of violence in both and their relationship with the concept masculinity as discussed in this dissertation. Both productions offer a similar structure when studying violence since in the two, once violence appears, it gains importance and relevance in the story. Besides, the main protagonists' gender identity is altered due to their relationship with violence. Both men, the Driver and Tom, seem to live in a world that does not belong to them, a world where violence is their only instrument to become the men that they really are.

A History of Violence and *Drive*, Where Masculinity Merges into Violence

A History of Violence and *Drive* are violent films where masculinity has a major role. It is nothing new that masculinity and violence are presented going hand by hand in films. In Cronenberg's work violence is harsh and powerful. Violence is pictured in a very realistic way, as in a brutal street fight. The director does not question what is right or wrong, but decides to show violence as a key element of the past of Tom/Joey, a man whose male identity and personality are molded by violence. All of Cronenberg's films are concerned with two main elements: answering the question of who we are, and the real nature of human consciousness. We have to mention here *The Fly* (1986), which can be considered Cronenberg's big success. It deals with a scientist who transforms into a hybrid fly, a story that echoes Kafka's *Metamorphosis.* The transformation can be interpreted as a mental process that happens in the mind of the protagonist and the domains of the self-consciousness. In turn, *A History of Violence* can be interpreted as a study of violence in men. Tom has a history of violence that will shake his life and the lives of the ones he loves. Cronenberg could very well imply that the Tom's family is in fact the human family and that no one can escape violence. Even in the small town in rural Indiana where Tom lives under that façade of peace no one can turn their back to violence. Violence, Cronenberg seems to say, is in our mind, shaping our consciousness, our past and our future. That could be the reason why Tom's family seems not to have another option but to accept Tom's past without even complaining or being mad about it.

In Refn's film the presentation of masculinity and violence is worth observing. It was Ryan Gosling who asked Refn to be the director of a film that, according to him, had great potential. The initial script was written to be a production with a big budget; a film with a *Fast and Furious* style. However, neither Gosling nor Refn wanted that, as the director explains:

> I read that earlier Universal script that was meant to be much bigger, extravagant, and a huge a franchise. Neither Ryan nor I wanted to do that, but we still wanted to work together. So, through our meeting, I had this big catharsis that led to me seeing the movie as the story of a man and a car, a guy who drives the car listening to pop music, and the pop music is his only kind of emotional release. That's definitely not what the original script was. [*Laughs*.] Like everybody else, I see the big studio movies from time to time, and they look good, but those aren't the kinds of movie that I seek out, really. That's just never been my thing. (in Barone 2011)

Refn acknowledged that he was lucky because he was in a favourable position. Gosling chose him as a director and this allowed him to do whatever he wanted. Besides, Gosling and Refn shared a special chemistry and they had similar views on the style of the film. Refn states:

> Well, I think it had to do with the unique situation that Ryan Gosling personally wanted me, and only me, to make the film, and he would protect me so that I could make the film that I wanted to make. It was a very similar situation to when Lee Marvin wanted John Boorman to direct *Point Blank*, and when Steve McQueen wanted Peter Yates to do *Bullitt*; I was in a very, very good place with *Drive*. It was the best possible situation that I could be in, and then I also had some very smart producers and very smart financiers who realized, very quickly, that Ryan and I were so telekinetic that we knew the exact film that we wanted to make, and there wasn't any way that we could do anything *but* that movie. They realized that they were just there to protect us, essentially, and make sure that we got what we needed. (in Barone 2011)

From the Gosling-Refn combination emerged a film which combined aesthetic and narrative elements to perfection. Violence is depicted with delicacy, but without undermining its harshness and crudity. The whole movie seems to be a reflection on the effects of violence in North American society in general and on men in particular.

There are different aspects we need to discuss about the films before moving to dissect violence into the four main categories that have been presented so far: interpersonal, institutional, structural violence, and finally, heroic violence. The theoretical chapter concerning violence aimed to give a definition of violence so as to have a better understanding of it. Violence stems from aggressiveness, which is an innate activity; but it is aggressiveness that is altered by sociocultural factors that turns it into something intentionally harmful. That is why Sanmartín (2000) and Molina (2002) talk about two concepts when dealing with violence; we need to distinguish between biologically aggressive and culturally violent behaviour. Both in *A History of Violence* and *Drive* one can try to apply these two concepts to understand the characters better. Tom and the Driver are people who are biologically aggressive and culturally violent. Both men have been shaped by a violent past that defines them as they are now. It is more evident in Tom's past, since it is explained in the story that he used to be a violent gangster. However, we know very little about the Driver's background; although it is evident that violence is what defines him as the man he wants to be to save Irene and become a hero for her and her son.

An interesting thing to analyse in *A History of Violence* concerning the issue of culturally violent behaviour is the role of Tom's son, who apparently is not violent. He seems to be a good boy, and he always runs away from trouble. However, he changes once he realises that his father has taken part in the heroic violent episode at his diner. The first time we encounter him he is with his little sister because she had a bad dream and he is being sweet to her and to his mother and father. Later in the film, he is playing baseball with his friends and he successfully saves a ball that

gives his team the victory. Because of that, there is a boy from the other team who is angry with him and once in the dressing room a confrontation occurs:

> BOBBY: Guess you think you're hot shit, Stall?
> JACK: What? No, I don't.
> BOBBY: Little hero here, huh? Little superstar here.
> […]
> BOBBY: Listen to this little faggot.
> JACK: Yeah, you're right. I'm both little and a faggot. You got me dead to rights.
> BOBBY: Come on, chickenshit, let's do this.
> JACK: What would be the point? I mean, you win. You win, you win. You've established your alpha male standing. You've established my unworthiness. But doing violence to me just seems pointless and cruel, don't you think? (Cronenberg 2005)

As we can see in this example from the film (see Appendix II: 1c), Jack avoids violence; he does not want to fight. He says that violence is pointless and cruel. At this stage the viewer sees him as a reflection of Tom, who has been presented as a caring father and husband. He has decided not to be violent. He may be biologically aggressive, but at this stage he is not culturally violent, following, we assume, the values that his father might have taught him.

Cronenberg cleverly defines Tom as a good man from the beginning of the film. In the first scene he shows us two men outside a motel who are about to commit a crime. The older man kills two people and the younger man murders a little girl. Although the first two crimes are not actually filmed happening, Cronenberg lets us see the brutality of both acts showing the dead bodies in the motel and the final gunshot to the innocent child, which is interrupted by Tom's daughter screaming in the middle of the night. Tom is the one who goes first to calm her because she has had a bad dream. When his wife and son join them he says: "Sarah had a bad dream about monsters. And I was telling her that there is no such thing as monsters" (Cronenberg 2005). The bad dream evokes the previous violent scene, which crudity is emphasised with the crying of Tom's daughter. Moreover, the word 'monsters' may very well be referring to bad people and not to monsters that come out of the closet. Interestingly enough, it is the father who tells her that monsters do not exist, but he will eventually become one.

The protagonist of *Drive* has some similitude with Tom. However, from the beginning of the film, he is presented as a 'tough guy' (see Appendix II: 2a). In the first scene he takes part in a robbery. He drives for two men who have apparently robbed something and he needs to drive them to somewhere safe. Due to the tension of the situation, he is always serious, mysterious, with a

toothpick in his mouth. Nevertheless, right after this tense scene a joyful song starts playing along with the credits: "There is something inside you, it's hard to explain, they are talking about you boy, but you're still the same". The lyrics are giving us a clue about the Driver; we do not know much yet about him, but we are encouraged to picture him as someone intriguing, a man that has something inside that will soon be discovered.

The first meeting between Irene and the Driver takes place in the lift. He is wearing the scorpion jacket (Appendix II: 2b) that carries metaphorical meaning, as Refn explains:

> That jacket came out of me listening to the KISS song "I Was Made For Loving You." Driver had to have a satin jacket that was like an armor, and the image of a scorpion evokes that sort of protection, I think. And, for some reason, the jacket feels like it fits perfectly with that KISS song. I can't really explain why. (in Barone 2011)

The Driver himself acts like a scorpion: he is not a person to be trusted, he has a dark personality. Almost at the end of the film the Driver asks "Have you ever heard of the story of the scorpion and the frog?" (Refn 2011). He is referring to a fable about a scorpion that asks a frog to help him to cross a river. The frog is afraid of the scorpion but the scorpion explains to the frog that if he stings him he will also die because both would drown, so the frog agrees. However, the scorpion does sting the frog while crossing the river, even though this means that both will die. The frog cannot avoid asking why he did this and the scorpion answers that it is in his nature to do so. The Driver goes on and comments "Your friend Nino didn't make it across the river", making reference to the scene where he himself kills Nino holding his head under the water. Nino, a Jewish gangster, is the owner of the restaurant and Bernie's business partner to whom Standard owns the money. After killing Nino, the scorpion on the Driver's jacket becomes really meaningful for those who are familiar with the fable. However, the Driver does not die in the river. It is in the final scene with Bernie, Nino's partner and friend, when he almost gets killed and decides to drive away so as to keep Irene and Benicio safe:

> The film brilliantly portrays Ryan's character as the scorpion with his awesome jacket [...]. The fable basically tells us that some creatures (or humans) do things not because they necessarily want to, but because they feel they need to. They don't compute the ramifications or think things through, they just act on impulse. This fits Ryan's character perfectly. He lives on the wild side and when presented with an opportunity, he jumps on it instinctively. He is calm, cool and collected till he needs to sting, and when he does, boy had you better watch out. (Warner 2011)

The protagonist is also presented as a policeman when he is working as a stunt for a film. He is dressed as a police officer in the shooting of an action film and he is wearing a mask, the same mask that he will wear to kill Nino. According to Refn,

> [t]he driver wearing a mask was our way to show that The Driver has completed his own transformation into becoming his own superhero. The movie, if you think about it, is *about* a man who transforms himself into a superhero and fights the bad guys, and superheroes need their own costume. The mask is his (in Barone 2011).

Again, he is portrayed as the hardened man who likes to take risks and enjoys extreme experiences. However, we are allowed to go deeper inside the Driver's personality when he bumps into Irene and Benicio in the supermarket. Now we discover his other side. Irene has a problem with her car and he helps them by taking them home, and he carries Irene's shopping bag. He does not talk much, but the expression in his face talks by itself; it looks different, happier. Once inside the lift the Driver and Benicio are looking at each other, they smile and Irene also looks really happy. Now he seems to be a caring man with Benicio and with Irene. He is quiet and he hardly shows his feelings, but he has a tender attitude with her and her son. Moreover, there are two meaningful shots were the Driver is taking Benicio to bed, he is asleep and Irene observes them with joy (see Appendix II: 2c). It is highly significant that Refn decides to portray the Driver playing the father role with Benicio. Now, we observe him as a kind man that seems to have a lot to offer two this 'incomplete' family. Benicio's father is in jail and Irene can very well be seeing her new friend as the man she lacks to raise Benicio. There is a very interesting shot when they are at Irene's flat, where we can see Irene and a mirror behind her with the Driver's reflection and a photo of Benicio and his father, an image that is used to foreshadow the dilemma that Irene will have concerning the Driver and Standard once he is freed from prison. Both in *A History* and *Drive*, then, we are introduced to two men who seem to fulfill the role of devoted fathers, docile and calm men who do not show signs of violence at the very beginning of the film.

In the introductory chapter on violence we also discussed the fact that men feel the urge to prove that they were different from women, and violence is the tool through which they can show their power and maleness. Gavon Titley affirms that violence gives power to men and that it "involves not just physical but psychological survival, and where opportunities are lacking, self-respect can be temporarily regained through power over someone else" (2003: 25). In *A History*, there is a turning point in Jack's character. He is portrayed as a violent boy after the killings at his father's diner. Jack seems to use violence to survive; he now has the strength to fight back because it

is something that has seen at home, with the episode of his dad. At school, Tom encounters the same boy and again he is looking for trouble: "So, your old man's some kind of tough guy, huh? What's he think of his wimp son? You think he'd take this shit? You think he'd make jokes? Go on, bitch. Say something funny. Uh-oh. He's getting mad" (Cronenberg 2005). After that, his girlfriend tells him that this boy is an idiot and she suggests that they would better go and avoid him. "Yeah, puss. Run away. Goddamn, I bet your daddy would be real ashamed by you. Go on, bitch. Say something funny. Make me laugh" (Cronenberg 2005), he repeats. However, this time Jack feels that violence has won the battle and he cannot avoid hitting him with rage, saying: "Ok, you motherfucker! Get over there, you son of a bitch! Come here. Are you laughing? Are you laughing now you motherfucking cocksucking piece of shit? (Cronenberg 2005). The scene is extremely violent because Jack hits the boy with brutality and leaves him lying on the floor. Therefore, one could argue that violence here serves as a tool for physical and psychological survival for Jack. He seems to look for respect and control by making use of violence. It is through violent behaviour that he fights the boy back so as to stop his abusive actions and control over him.

In *Drive* violence is also seen as empowering. The Driver also shows his power and manliness through aggressive actions. Once Standard has been beaten up and he becomes aware of his problems he decides to help him and his family with the use of violence. The Driver is a brave man, he does not feel any fear and helping Irene might be seen as a test to prove that he is the man she needs. In this respect, it is relevant to remember David Gilmore's research on masculinity and violence, where he points out that all over the world men undergo violent tests to prove their manhood (1990: 24). Men need violence to prove their virility and strength. The Driver voluntarily decides to help Standard to pay his debt to Cook's gang and Irene seems satisfied about it. The Driver, like Jack and Tom in *A History*, changes. The motel scene turns out to be determining to mark a before and after in his portrayal as a character. After killing the men, covered in blood, the Driver experiences a transformation from which there is no way back. The scene is cruel and harsh, the Driver is no longer the caring man we thought he was.

It is thought that men are more violent than women, and many seem to think that they are doomed to fighting and showing their manliness whenever possible. Some people blame testosterone for this masculine violent nature. Nevertheless, as we already discussed in the previous chapter, biological essentialism is not the cause for violence in men, as Connell explains in *The Men and the Boys* (2000). It is true, however, that in both films men are the ones who show signs of violence. In *A History* men are portrayed as the dominant and violent sex. Tom's wife has a strong personality but she always decides to look for a more civilised solution when a problem occurs – she is the one who calls Sam, the police officer, every time there is a problem with Fogarty's people.

Another episode when men are portrayed as superior to women is at Tom's diner, the night of the killings, when the criminals want to rape and kill the waitress. According to Iadicola and Shupe,

> patriarchy provides even poor, displaced men with a sense of power and control over others that is celebrated and promoted in hierarchical societies. It also provides a bridge across the division of social class for men. Thus men who are of very different economic positions can jointly celebrate their domination of women as they revel their sexual exploits or conquests. (2013: 385)

Thus, the robbers' use of violence give them a sense of superiority and domination over others. Patriarchy nourishes them with control and male supremacy. Tom wants to protect Charlotte and sends her home, again implying that violence is just men's businesses. However one of the men goes after her and makes her stay:

> TOM: You can go home now, Charlotte. Just leave the pie.
> CHARLOTTE: OK.
> BILLY: You're going to be sticking around for a while, honey.
> CHARLOTTE: Tom?
> BILLY: Don't fucking move. (Cronenberg 2005)

In *Drive* there are only two female characters: Irene is the embodiment of an angelical woman, a vulnerable and sweet girl who needs protection. Blanche is also weak; she gets killed by Cook's men in the motel. She is portrayed as an object, she is part of Cook's plan to get the money back from Standard. When Standard, the Driver and Cook are discussing how to get his money back Blanche is also there. She is sitting, not taking part in the conversation, and they are standing talking about their plan when Standard comments:

> STANDARD: I can't do this thing alone.
> COOK: You got Blanche.
> STANDARD: Come on, man.
> COOK: She's beautiful. Look at her. What the fuck you rolling our eyes at for? You know what, get the fuck out of here. Get up! Standard, take her with you and go get her a fucking Coke! (Refn 2011)

Blanche is thus treated as an insignificant person; someone they can just ignore or treat as they want. The three men are violent and feel violence as empowering, giving them the right to treat Blanche like an object. It is not surprising that men are portrayed as the dominant sex. According to Connell,

> Men are much more likely to hold state power: for instance, men are ten times more likely than women to hold office as a member of parliament (an average across all countries of the world). Perhaps men do most of the work? No: in the rich countries, time-budget studies show women and men work on average about the same number of hours in the year. (The major difference is in how much of this work gets paid.)
>
> Given these facts, the 'battle of the sexes' is no joke. Social struggle must result from inequalities on such a scale. It follows that the politics of masculinity cannot concern only questions of personal life and identity. It must also concern questions of social justice.
>
> A structure of inequality on this scale, involving a massive dispossession of social resources, is hard to imagine without violence. It is, overwhelmingly, the dominant gender who hold and use the means of violence. Men are armed far more often tan women. (2005: 83)

Power and violence seem to go hand by hand when dealing with masculinity. The dominant sex is the one that makes use of violence to impose their power. Connell goes on explaining that

> many members of the privileged group use violence to sustain their dominance. Intimidation of women ranges across the spectrum from wolf-whistling in the street, to office harassment, to rape and domestic assault, to murder by a woman's patriarchal 'owner', such as a separated husband. Physical attacks are commonly accompanied by verbal abuse of women (whores and bitches, in recent popular music that recommends beating women). (2005: 83)

Blanche in *Drive* is intimidated by the Driver slapping her in the face and shoving her on the bed, covering her mouth and saying: "From now on, every word out of your mouth is the truth or I'm going to hurt you. Do you understand?" (Refn 2011). The scene is shocking: it is the first time we are allowed to see the Driver's dark side. The way he imposes his masculinity and power over Blanche and the way he talks to her is a sign of his sudden confusion and frustration. The robbery has not gone as expected and this is how he shows his fear and anxiety. In this way, the driver seems to use violence to reinforce his masculinity in crisis after failing to be a hero for Irene. In the same way, Edie, Tom's wife in *A History*, is a victim of violence. After discovering her husband's true identity his violent past as a killer she is disoriented. When Sam, the police officer, stops by, Edie lies to him about her husband in order to protect him. Afterwards, she cries and he tries to calm her down, but she is infuriated and shouts: "Get off of me! Fuck you, Joey! Get off!" (Cronenberg 2005). This episode takes place on the stairs of their house and the argument ends up with a violent sexual scene which recalls a rape (Appendix II: 1e). The scene is intense and brutal: Joey intimidates Edie and aggressively imposes his strength and manliness on her. Edie is later portrayed as a battered woman, naked, showing physical injuries which evoke sexual harassment, since she

has bruises on her back as the result of having been lying down on the stairs. Again, as commented in *Drive*, Tom/Joey turns to violence to fight his identity crisis as a man. Imposing his manly behaviour on Edie, Joey gains control again of the situation in which he seemed to be losing his status as a heroic, respected and desired man.

It is vital to take into account, however, that the fact of portraying men as it is done in these films does not imply that all men are violent. Connell explains that there are many non-violent men in the world "[m]ost men do not attack or harass women", but at the same time he affirms that "those who do are unlikely to think themselves deviant. On the contrary, they usually feel they are entirely justified, that they are exercising a right. They are authorized by an ideology of supremacy" (2005: 83). This justified supremacy is a feature that is easily recognisable in both films, since men seem to think they are superior to others just because they control them through violence. What is true is that violence is one of the key pillars of the stereotypical construction of masculinity. Together with other parameters such as strength, control, possession or aggression, it is undeniable that violence is paramount in the discourse of power and the traditional, patriarchal conception of virility.

It is also true that violence is widely recognised as a male phenomenon. According to Christopher Strain, who we mentioned in the previous chapter, "[m]en top all major crime indexes; it is men who fill prisons. Domestic violence is overwhelmingly committed by husbands against wives; criminal rape, which shades into sexual intercourse under pressure, is also overwhelmingly committed by men" (2010: 15). So while it is certain that not all men commit violent crimes, "most violent acts occur at the hands of men" (Strain 2010: 15). In *A History* there is a scene where Fogarty's men go to Tom's house in order to take him with them. They have Jack in the car and they want Tom to surrender and accept his real identity. Tom asks his wife to go into the house "Baby wait. Edie... I will get him. I'll get him. Please. Go up to Sarah. Go up to her. Do it" (Cronenberg 2005). Edie obeys him and leaves. She continuous to be present in the scene but from inside the house, looking through the window. Outside is men's territory; violence is a male thing and Edie is not supposed to take part in it. Later, Tom also asks his son to go away, "back into the house" (Cronenberg 2005), when it is evident that Tom foresees that something bad is going to happen there between him and Fogarty's gang.

Neither in *A History* nor in *Drive* are women portrayed as violent characters. Crime only occurs at the hands of men in both films. They are the ones who kill people and harass women; they are the aggressive and violent sex. However, as we previously discussed here, not all men are presented as violent. Male characters such as Sam, the police officer in *A History*, and Shannon, the Driver's employee in *Drive*, are peaceful men who do not make use of violence. As Barak states,

> [e]ven in those societies which can be (or are) characterized as aggressive or violent, relatively few boys or men, and even fewer girls or women, actually kill or seriously wound anybody during the course of their lives. In social reality, no matter how angry or mad most people become even in the so-called violent societies, they have learned to control their "aggressive natures." This is not to deny that we are all born with the potential and capacity for learning both violence and nonviolence. (2003: 213)

Therefore, characters such as Sam or Shannon are men who, although living a violent world, have learned to control their aggressiveness and have opted for nonviolence. Although these two characters are not really developed in the films, they can be used to illustrate, in a very simplistic way, the non-aggressive side of both the Driver and Tom. After Fogarty's visit to Tom's diner, Edie calls Sam asking him to keep an eye on them. Sam goes after them and stops them with his car; Sam behaves as a peaceful police officer, he seems to be avoiding trouble: "Let me make something clear to you Mr. Mulligan. This is a nice town. We have nice people. We take care of our nice people" (Cronenberg 2005). Right after this scene, Sam goes to Tom's house and explains to him everything about Fogarty's people. He is an honest man and he is worried about them. He wants to protect them and stay away from violence. Tom thanks him for his help: "It's good to know you're watching out for us"; and Sam replies: "Come on, Tom. You know we look out for our own here" (Cronenberg 2005). In *Drive* there is scene when Shannon decides to leave because the Driver has warned him to do so. However, Bernie turns up in his garage: "Going somewhere?" and Shannon answers: "Thinking about it" (Refn 2011). He chooses to leave and avoid any sort of confrontation, but it is too late. Shannon seems weak and defenceless when talking to Bernie, frightened; it appears that he knows what is coming. They shake hands and Bernie slashes his arm with a knife.

In both films violence is represented in different environments and in many forms. And, although not all men are portrayed as furious and brutal, traditional masculinity traits reinforce the link between gender construction and violent behaviour. As we introduced in the previous chapter, according to Peter Iadicola and Anson Shupe in *Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom* (2013), many forms of violence overlap three main contexts: the interpersonal, the institutional and the structural. Taking this into account, we can speak of three main types of violence with the same label. According to Barak, distinguishing between these three spheres of violence is very useful for thinking about violence in general, but he explains that

> [a]nyone performing such an examination, however, should not lose sight of the fact that these three worlds are typically not isolated from or unrelated to one another. In everyday reality, the three worlds are interactive and reciprocal in the social formation and production of violence. In the case of sexual harassment or sexual

> assault, for example, it is often most difficult, if not impossible, to separate the interpersonal from the institutional. Thus, it makes sense not only to think of the spheres of violence as being connected and independent, but to view the different forms of violence as representing overlapping and accumulating relations of violence. (2003: 46)

Interpersonal, institutional and structural violence are then blending spheres. Therefore, one needs to be careful when trying to differentiate between interpersonal and institutional traits of sexual assault, for example, since they fit in both types. However, *A History* and *Drive* will help us to provide powerful and valuable differentiated descriptions and clear representations of these three types of violence. Moreover, violence in these filmic productions will also be analysed from another perspective, which is by applying the concept of heroic violence, a term coined by John Cawelti. In both films the violent protagonists are portrayed as heroes who embrace some sort of morally justified heroic violence, which seem to fight the universal dichotomy of good and bad as a way to justify their masculinity and violence.

Interpersonal Violence in the Two Films

In the previous chapter we defined interpersonal violence as the violence between individuals, which is not related to any social institution. Rape, assault or homicide are common violent acts when we think of interpersonal violence. According to Barak,

> [t]hese acts, involving two or more people, are usually associated with overt instances of physical harm or injury: someone is pushed around, roughed up, hit, stabbed, invaded, shot, or restrained. 'Acts of interpersonal violence', however, also refers to violations of personhood, or to pain and injury that need not be physical (Brown 1987). These 'covert' and emotional harms infringe upon, disregard, abuse, and/or deny another person's right to selfhood. In addition, these emotional violations recognize that individuals can be victimized as both objects and subjects. In other words, any act that depersonalizes, dehumanizes, or transforms human beings into 'things' would qualify as interpersonal violence. (2003: 46)

Adhering to the strict definition of interpersonal violence, one needs to think of the "abuse or injury that happens between people acting in their private lives without regard to occupational roles and formal institutions" (Barak 2003: 48). Barak distinguishes five main forms of interpersonal violence: Homicide, juvenile victimisation, physical and sexual child abuse, rape and stalking. In *A History* and *Drive* we will concentrate on homicide because it is the most important and relevant act of violence in both films. Homicide can be defined as the killing of a person by

another. Barak differentiates criminal homicide and noncriminal homicide, which, at the same time, have some subtypes. Criminal homicides can be divided into: (1) first-degree murder, when the killing takes place with some sort of premeditation; (2) second-degree murder, when the murder is a result of the desire to do harm but not from premeditation; (3) voluntary manslaughter, when there was only the intention to physically hurt someone and not to kill them; and (4) involuntary manslaughter, when death is caused by a negligent act and there was not the intention to harm anyone. On the other hand, noncriminal homicides comprise: self-defense and justifiable. Self-defense involves killing someone as a result of protecting a property, a person or oneself. And a justifiable homicide is the murder of a person "under the authority of the law, as when the police kill a felon or when a convicted offender is executed by the state" (Barak 2003: 49).

Iadicola and Shupe define murder as "the killing that occurs outside the institutional roles the actors are performing" (2013: 106). Thus, they explain,

> [t]he acts of violence committed by a police officer or a soldier would be considered appropriate institutional violence and would not be included in homicide statistics. On the other hand, other areas of institutional violence would be defined as illegal homicides yet are also institutional violence. One example is that of a husband or wife killing each other or killing one of their children during a domestic quarrel; family violence or violence among intimates composes a significant proportion of homicides. In most of these cases we are talking about institutional violence that maintains, extends, or challenges asymmetric gender/age/power relations. In these latter cases of violence, they are included in the statistics on homicide yet they are cases of individuals acting in the context of roles within a social institution. (2013: 106)

In *A History of Violence* and *Drive* there are various examples that could be used to illustrate homicide as a form of interpersonal violence. Both the Driver and Tom commit different homicides which perfectly fit into Barak's categorisation. In *A History* Tom's life changes after he kills the two mysterious men at his diner (Appendix II: 1a). The murdering of these two men is seen as something heroic, a courageous act to save his customers and employees. Following Barak's division one could argue that Tom kills them in self-defence since he does not have the intention to kill anyone, he is just protecting people. In fact, Tom is pictured as a very polite man who seems to avoid any sort of confrontation: “TOM: Sir, we don't carry much cash here. You gentlemen are certainly welcome to all of it // LELAND: Oh I know that, asshole, believe me. Ok Billy let's show this asshole we mean business” (Cronenberg 2005).

In the same way as his son Jack successfully keeps violence away in the locker room scene, Tom tries to evade the situation, explaining that they have already closed, and that they do not carry much cash but that they are welcome to it. However, once Tom realises that a simple robbery is not

what they are looking for – the younger man, Billy, seems to want to rape the waitress and the older one, Leland, aims his gun at him – he decides to take action. In very precise moves, like a professional killer, he breaks the coffee pot on Leland's face, takes his gun and shoots Billy. Leland stabs Tom's foot with a knife, but he quickly pulls the trigger to finish him off. The older man is lying on the floor and everything that we can see is his disfigured face (Appendix II: 1b), covered in blood, while Tom makes sure everyone is completely safe. Tom's killing can be interpreted as a noncriminal homicide since he acts in self-defence. He kills the robbers to protect himself and the other people in the diner. At the beginning of the film, Cronenberg chooses to present Tom as a nonviolent man who does not fit in the macho man prototype. In fact, the first sex scene is cleverly used by the director to portray Tom as a passive sex man for his wife. Edie is the one who plans to have adolescence sex with him after picking him up at his diner. Tom seems intimidated by her, he acts in a very childish and innocent way while waiting for Edie in their bedroom. Tom does not know what to do, he sits on the bed and waits. Moreover, it is interesting to point out that the sexual act is not actually shown; he just engages in preliminary games. However, in the second sexual scene, once Tom's regression into Joey has taken place, we discover the violent Joey, whose sexual behaviour resembles the one of a rapist. The sexual act is shown in its crudity and in a non-romantic way. Tom is portrayed as the dominant male who forces his wife to have sex. Therefore, Tom's sexuality is also a reflection of his own self, unveiling his darker masculine side.

In *Drive,* the first bloody homicides occur in the motel where the Driver and Blanche are forced to go after Standard has been killed. The scene is extremely violent and cruel. However, the Driver's killings, like Tom's in *A History*, could be seen as defensive actions. He does what he has to do to survive and, theoretically, he is playing by the rules. The Driver cannot avoid Blanche's death – she is killed by a gunshot directly to her head. After that, the real massacre takes place: the Driver kills the two men and emerges from the dark bathroom into light covered in blood. This scene marks a before and after in the Driver's characterisation. The bloodstains in his face may very well be read as an obscure and sinister baptism to welcome his new self (Appendix II: 2d). He is a new man with a new masculine aura that will gradually grow darker to finally embrace violence forever.

Let us now contrast these two violent events where both Tom and the Driver use violence for the first time in other scenes that demand our attention. Focusing on *A History*, we will concentrate on when Fogarty's people pay Tom a visit. They have kidnapped Jack, and both Edie and Tom realise of the seriousness of the situation. In order to have his son back, Tom accepts to drop his weapon and agrees to surrender; however, he uses his skills as a professional killer to cruelly eliminate all the men, with the exception of Fogarty. Surprisingly, it is Tom's son who shoots Fogarty, saving his father (Appendix II: 1d). What is important to analyse in this brutal scene is the

way Tom behaves. He is now a different man. He is no longer the caring father and loving husband we are introduced to at the beginning of the story. In fact, it is Edie who, in the hospital, points out:

> EDIE: It's not what I heard. It's what I saw. I saw Joey. I saw you turn into Joey right before my eyes. I saw a killer, the one Fogarty warned me about. You did kill men back in Philly, didn't you? Did you do it for money or did you do it because you enjoyed it?
> TOM: Joey did, both. I didn't. Tom Stall didn't. (Cronenberg 2005)

Edie is devastated when Tom actually admits that he is Joey Cusack and that he has killed both for pleasure and for money. There is no coming back for Tom. His turbulent past as a gangster has been revealed and he will not have other alternative than going to Philadelphia to get rid of his brother and bury his true identity as the violent Joey forever. Moreover, in this same scene, the fact that Jack kills Fogarty reinforces the concept of violence in the film. Violence is powerful and brutal. Tom changes the coffee pot for a shotgun; and also his son Jack, who fought Bobby back at school high school, does not hesitate to shoot Fogarty to save his father when the time comes. Like the Driver in the motel room scene described above, Tom has blood stains in his face and walks towards his frightened son with a disturbing look. He finally grabs the shotgun and embraces him.

Another act of interpersonal violence in *Drive* that is vital to understand the Driver's connection with violence is the elevator scene. The Driver wants to give Nino his money but he does not accept it, so he sends a hitman to the Driver's flat building. Unaware of the danger, Irene and the Driver take the elevator. In a moment of breathtaking tension, the Driver kisses Irene; a moment that is captured as perhaps the most romantic episode in the film, accompanied with slow motion camera movements and an almost hypnotic background music (Appendix II: 2e).

> Their delayed kiss becomes a beautiful pit stop within a heinous expression of rage; the golden light thickens and glows, illuminating Irene as headiness – and the Driver – descends. The hovering assassin is momentarily forgotten (with the moment gloriously extended in syrupy slow-motion) before the violence bursts forth. The beats and rhythms in this scene – the long, measured inhale before the explosive spewing of blood, bone and motor oil – are perfectly attuned to *Drive'*s macro-structure. (Boyle 2011)

The moment of idyllic peace is suddenly broken by the atrocity of the Driver crashing the would-be murderer's head with his foot (Appendix II: 2f). The brutality with which he stomps on the man's cranium echoes his frustration as a man. Showing his dark side helps him to construct his identity as the dominant male. Irene is horrified and steps out of the elevator, staring at the Driver, hunchbacked and soaked in sweat, who appears to have metamorphosed into the omnipresent figure

of scorpion on his jacket: "he seems to understand that he's well and truly stung the frog, and that he's already drowning in the blood of the men he seeks. There is to be no return to the world of before" (Boyle 2011). The doors closing after this horrendous episode represent the growing isolation between Irene and the driver. The final shot frames the scorpion on the Driver's jacket, which seems to have been brought to life because of the Driver's heavy breathing.

Both Tom and the Driver commit other homicides after experiencing their transformation into violent heroes. Tom feels the urge to go to Philadelphia to meet his brother in order to prevent more crime. However, Richie wants to see Tom dead and he decides to fight back. It is true that Tom's actions could be described again as self-defence since it is Richie who attacks him first, but Tom's killings also fit in Barak's category of second-degree murders: Tom desires to do harm, but it is not premeditated. Tom kills Richie's men one by one and he finally kills his brother in cold blood. Tom does not hesitate when he kills him because he seems to know that there is no other option to bury his past forever. In Philadelphia we encounter the real Joey who had been hiding under Tom's mask. Therefore, it is not easy to decipher Tom/Joey's actions in when destroying his brother and the other gangsters. Cronenberg allows different interpretations. Does Tom really care about his brother? Does he want to make peace? Or did he plan to eliminate him before going there? If this was the case Tom's acts should be described as first-degree murders. Tom could have planned to kill his brother back in Indiana, an analysis that is reinforced by the fact that he introduces himself as Joey "Yeah, I'm Joey" once he meets the gangster at the bar in Philadelphia, reaffirming his violent and turbulent past. Thus, three possible interpretations are conceivable here: killing as an act of self-defense, second-degree murders or first-degree murders. What is certain is that after the massacre it is Joey who heads for Indiana willing to wear Tom's mask for the second time.

In *Drive*, the murdering of Nino and Bernie fall into the category of first-degree murder, since there the Driver has the intention to kill them. The Driver stalking Nino from outside of his restaurant foreshadows bad things to come. Both Nino and Bernie are the villains who deserve to die. Corruption and violence in Los Angeles reinforce the evil nature of the characters. Nino and Bernie are part of the city's perversion and crime. The tough nature of these men places them at the same level as the Driver. Heroes, corrupt characters and villains, all need to test their superior masculinity in some way. The Driver is a morally ambiguous man who wants to fight corruption and crime with the same weapon: extreme violence. His acts serve to show himself as a hard man in a perfect scenario where violence is allowed and male strength and control become vital. Killing Nino, who had been presented as very powerful and evil, helps to establish the Driver's superior masculinity. When he kills him he does not show his feelings and he acts as a sadistic criminal, a fact which reaffirms his communion with violence and the masculine. He could have shot Nino but

he decides to get rid of him in a theatrical way. He wears the stunt mask and chases him with his car. Once in the beach, he is filmed as a superior figure, from bottom to top, as he observes Nino from his privileged position on the road. The Driver is enjoying violence. He is not interested in the money and he calls Bernie to talk about it. Besides, he calls Irene and he apologises for the bad things he has done; however, he does not try to convince her to run away with him. He knows that he would be a bad influence for Irene and her son. Now, there is just one more thing he needs to do: he has to kill Bernie. Once outside the Chinese restaurant it is Bernie who stabs him first but the Driver manages to murder him. The Driver escapes with his car, to an unknown future, leaving Bernie and the bag of money behind. It could be argued that he felt the moral obligation to kill Bernie as a revenge for what happened to Standard and Shannon and also to protect the woman he loves. However, there is also the possible interpretation of his necessity to kill Bernie as a way to show his true nature and virility. Killing both Nino and Bernie establishes the Driver as the triumphant hero whose masculinity has turned out to be his most precious weapon.

Institutional Violence in the Corpus

Historically, institutional violence has not been so visible as interpersonal and structural violence. Only recently, for example, has the United States started to pay attention to family violence as a serious form of institutional violence. According to Barak, one can differentiate five representative forms of institutional violence: family violence, childhood maltreatment, school violence, gang violence, and police and penal violence (2003: 79). Childhood maltreatment needs to be differentiated from juvenile victimisation (interpersonal violence) since it deals with violence between adults and children; how adults maltreat children from a position of control and dominance. On the other hand, juvenile victimisation refers to the violence that takes place between children and teenagers as peers. However, not all types of violence will be analysed in the films. Our aim here will be to focus on family violence and childhood maltreatment because they are the most relevant types of violence in order to understand the evolution of both characters, as well as their male identities – the patriarchal roles of both Tom and the Driver in their families and their relationship with children, as well as Jack's violent episode with Bobby at school.

Let us begin with family violence, which takes place when a person controls or hurts a member of his/her family or makes him or her be fearful by using violent or threatening behaviour. Iadicola and Shupe state that "[o]nly within the past century or so has violence within the family been regarded as a serious, widespread problem and then largely in Western societies. Yet the phenomenon has existed probably as long as the domestic institution itself" (2013: 153) In *Drive*

family violence is incorporated *in absentia*, to contribute to the characterisation of Standand. Once Standard comes out from prison, Refn surprises us presenting a reformed man who does not show any sign of aggressive nature. Breaking the viewer's expectations, the director highlights Standard's renewed personality, intentionally omitting family violence. Interestingly enough, with Standard's speech at his welcome party, Refn gets to make us feel sympathy for him and accept him as an honest man who fits perfectly in the Driver-Irene-Standard equation. Moreover, it is with his new friend Irene and Benicio (a family that he would like to be part of) when the Driver behaves as a non-violent character trying to fulfil the role of a caring father and husband. The Driver is seen as Standard's violent counterpart. Standard is presented as a weak man who cannot solve his own problems and therefore he cannot protect his family. The Driver's violent actions are apparently justified by Standard's lack of traditionally male skills.

We cannot say the same about Tom in *A History*. After lying to Sam, the police officer, about her husband, Edie gets furious and slaps Tom several times. Tom does not know how to make her listen to him and violently grabs her neck and pushes her against the wall. Edie tries to resist and they fall on the stairs where they end up having sex, a scene that blurs the boundary between violence and sex, as contemporary films tend to do too often. Tom seems to force her to have intercourse in order to calm her down and prove his dominant status. The scene is really graphic and it becomes intense and painful to watch since it is filmed as a rape. Later, we are allowed to discover Edie has some bruises in her back from their brutal sexual encounter. Through his hyper-masculine sexuality, thus, Tom oppresses Edie and imposes his patriarchal power on her. This is the first and only episode in which Tom is violent against his wife. Patriarchy teaches men that love and respect have to be achieved by being powerful, dominant and violent and this type of behaviour is also reflected in sex. The sexual scene is presented as if it were a rape, a pure act of violence inside the institution of the patriarchal nuclear family. Tom had acted as a weak and defenceless man in front of his wife since she is the one who stood up for him in front of Sam, who doubted about his real identity. Therefore, he feels the need to adopt a violent position to regain his threatened masculinity. For Tom, violent sex is a way to solve his identity problem. It is masculinity that transforms him into a violent husband who uses aggressive sex to impose control over Edie and regain his status.

As far as childhood maltreatment is concerned, *A History* offers some crucial examples. The opening scene of the younger robber killing the little girl in cold blood seems to be Cronenberg's warning of the brutal violent scenes that will be present in the film. The girl comes out of a room and catches the robber by surprise; she is crying and looking at the dead bodies lying on the floor, but he does not hesitate to shoot at her with his gun. A brutal act that unveils the robbers'

predisposition towards violence. On the other hand, Jack's character also serves the purpose of representing violence against children and youth. As we have seen, he is portrayed as a very vulnerable teenager who turns to violence once he discovers his father has killed the two men at his diner. Jack learns from his father's actions and adopts a violent behaviour. It is believed that abused children often become abusive people; they learn their parents' conduct and imitate it when they have a family on their own.

> Experts say that about one-third to as many as 40% of adults who were abused as children will repeat this behaviour pattern among their own children later in life. Abusive adults may have a low frustration tolerance or may think that their abusive behavior is normal, since this is how they were brought up themselves. (As a result, this may perpetuate a pattern, because often their own abusive parents were also abused by their parents, and the abuse may have occurred for generations). (Clark, Freeman and Adamec 2007: 26)

Therefore, we can state that violence, as a cultural element deeply connected to socialization, is a learned conduct that it is acquired through observation and the actual exposure to it. The second time Bobby wants to confront him at school Jack decides to fight back and he forcefully beats both Bobby and his friend in front of the other students. Once at home, Tom is worried about this school incident and the way Jack has decided to solve his problems, because the boy did not defend himself; he brutally struck his adversaries several times:

> TOM: What the hell were you thinking?
> JACK: I wasn't thinking.
> TOM: Obviously not.
> JACK: Bobby's been riding me all year, Dad. He's a jerk.
> TOM: He's a jerk?
> JACK: Yeah, he's a jerk.
> TOM: That's no excuse. You stand up to him. You don't put him in the hospital.
> JACK: Oh, big deal. It's the best thing anyone could've done to him. Besides, I only got suspended.
> TOM: It *is* a big deal! […] In this family, we do not solve our problems by hitting people!
> JACK: No, in this family, we shoot them! (Cronenberg 2005)

Tom slaps Jack after their quarrel, bringing down in pieces his former words about his attitude towards hitting people. Again, Tom uses violence, this time to impose his control over his son. Not only does his role as a father seem to be in peril, but also his masculinity. Through the slap, Tom shows Jack that he is the one who is in charge in the house; he continues to be the patriarch, no matter how much the gangsters have threatened him. Hitting his son empowers him and reaffirms

his regained masculinity. Tom has changed, the shooting episode at his diner has forced him to become someone different, and neither Jack nor Edie recognise him any more. However, Jack has also changed. Cronenberg seems to suggest that no one can escape from violence. He has become a violent and rebellious teenager who is not afraid to answer back.

Benicio, Irene's son in *Drive*, also embodies the topic of childhood maltreatment in our corpus. He is the one who witnesses his father's beating in the car park and to whom Cook's men give a bullet as a sign of threat: "You want me keep that for you?" (Refn 2011), the Driver asks Benicio. In fact, it is to protect Irene and her son that he decides to help Standard to rob the pawnshop: "They said they were going to come after Benicio and Irene next" (Refn 2011). Benicio is now the ultimate victim, and he needs protection. Therefore, the Driver feels the urgency to show his masculinity and virility so as to fulfil the role of the surrogate partner and father; a source of protection and comfort for both Irene and his son. "You put this kid behind the wheel, there's nothing he can't do" (Refn 2011) says Shannon when talking about the Driver. He is special; a man who does not have any fears and who is always in control. His excellent driving skills reinforce his strength; the powerful and aggressive racing car being the reflection of his nature: "Speeding in cars or trucks or on bikes is another form of intimidation" (Connell 2005: 99).

Throughout the first part of the film the relationship between Benicio as the innocent victim and the Driver as protector is built in a very special way. Refn pays attention to details to show their personal connection. The blinking game they play in the garage and on the elevator (competing about who will last longer without blinking) is used to represent the bond they are building. Benicio seems to feel great affection for his new friend, and the Driver shows him his affection in his own particular way: once in Irene's flat Benicio enters the kitchen wearing a spooky pumpkin mask and the Driver comments: "scary". The boy seems to be willing to become a 'tough guy' like the Driver. He wants to be a daring kid, and just after the mask episode the Driver asks him: "Hey, you want a toothpick?" (Refn 2011). Benicio holds out his hand and accepts it as an object that will ritually complete his rite of passage into toughness. Therefore, we could agree that although explicit violence is not directly addressed to Benicio in *Drive*, it is true that the child is very receptive to aggressiveness and intense behaviour. Benicio is very aware of the violence that surrounds him and of the male models at his disposal. When the Driver is watching the cartoons with him he asks Benicio:

> DRIVER: Is he a bad guy?
> BENICIO: Yeah.
> DRIVER: How can you tell?

BENICIO: Because he's a shark.
DRIVER: There is no good sharks?
BENICIO No, I mean. Just look at him. Does he look like a good guy to you? (Refn 2011)

Both Jack and Benicio are boys who, at a young age, have already encountered violence and without even being conscious about it they are adopting its cruelty in their conduct. Welcoming violence will help them to grow as masculine beings capable of harm. While Benicio looks up to the Driver as he is his masculine hero, Jack seems happy to discover his father's dark side, a fact that gives him the courage to fight Bobby back. Both Cronenberg and Refn suggest that violence has a devastating effect on human beings and warns us of its terrifying nature.

Structural Violence in *A History of Violence* and *Drive*

As we discussed in the previous chapter, structural violence refers to those who fight against social structures that promote suffering through exploitation or intolerance over others: "violence that occurs in the context of establishing, maintaining, extending, reducing or as consequence of the hierarchical ordering of categories of people in a society" (Barak 2003: 31). This type of violence is affected by authority and power, since it is power that rules and controls others. Structural violence refers to those situations that affect basic human needs, such as welfare, identity or freedom, as a consequence of social stratification and, therefore, there is no direct violence.

> Galtung (1969), one of the first to use the term structural violence in his writings in peace studies, defined it as the violence that is built into the writings in peace studies, defined it as the violence that is built into the structure of the society and manifests itself in differences in life changes. (Iadicola and Shupe 2013: 381)

It is an indirect type of violence, that is to say, hunger in the world does not exist because of a direct action, but because of indirect causes derived from a capitalist and unfair world. This type of violence takes place when there is a conflict between social groups that have different opportunities or different degrees of acceptance because of their sex, nationality, age, social class, etc. It is the result of different inconsistencies that are deeply rooted on solid social structures, which bring on unfair consequences.

> For example, violence can be an outcome of how we have organized a society in terms of access to basic necessities of survival. Or it can be an outcome of how we have organized a society in terms of access to pollution-free environment. Or it can be an outcome of how we have organized a society in terms of access to

> medical care and medicines to cure diseases. In short, it can be an outcome of how we have organized a society in terms of the distribution of life chances. Life chances refer to the opportunities in life to realize one's potential – intellectually, physically, and spiritually. Differences in infant mortality rates among groups that occupy different positions in systems of stratification are a violent outcome of this arrangement of people. (Iadicola and Shupe 2013: 380)

Structural violence is also dangerous because it can entail direct violence, since oppressed people sometimes turn to violence to fight for their needs. According to Barak, structural violence can be differentiated in different subtypes: postcolonial violence, corporate violence, underclass violence, terrorist violence or institutional-structural violence. Due to the fact that the causes that provoke structural violence are not visible if we do not perform a very exhaustive analysis, we will not attempt to describe all types of structural violence. Our aim will be to study the violent consequences that derive from hierarchical relations in society according to aspects such as class, gender or ethnic/racial identity, and their relationship with the characters' violent actions and their masculinity in the films *A History of Violence* and *Drive*. Elitism, classism, ethnocentrism, adultism, poverty and sexism are common sources of structural violence which we will try to visibilise in our corpus.

Elitism is the belief that some individuals – a group of people with certain qualities, intellect, wealth or influence – are better than others and that they are entitled to have a favourable situation of control and power. In both films, elitism is represented in the world of gangsters and criminals, whose functions follow a pyramidal structure. In our corpus we can see different examples of elitism: Fogarty's people and Richie's 'family' are presented as superior men in their microcosm – they are the ones who rule in their society and they think they are allowed to do as they please. They stress their elitism and emphasise their masculinity and power over others. After the killings at Tom's diner Fogarty's people come on the scene. They are presented as powerful men when they enter the diner. In fact, it is Edie who ironically comments: "Oh, look, more reporters. Nice"; but Tom states: "They don't look like reporters" (Cronenberg 2005). Fogarty is elegantly dressed in a black suit, wearing sunglasses; the other two men are also dressed in a formal way but there is a clear difference between Fogarty and his men. At a first glance, it is evident that Fogarty is the boss; the way he looks reflects his status and influence. Forgarty is the one who first identifies Tom as Joey. In this scene, the hierarchical differences between men are visible; Fogarty is the one who is in control of the situation and who intimidates Tom in front of his wife. His privileged elitist status empowers him and allows him to make use of coercion over others. In the same way, Tom's brother, Richie, is portrayed as a hyper-masculine man; he is the one who rules over his own little world. Richie sends his people to bring Joey back to Philadelphia, and when Tom arrives at his

house he observes that he is living in luxury, a fact that reinforces his dominant and authoritarian nature. Moreover, Richie's views on women also show that he considers himself a hegemonic man who is allowed to treat women as objects:

> Do you like being married? Does it work for you? I can't see it working for me. I never felt the urge, you know. A lot of great looking women in the world. I never met one, made me want to give up all the others. Sure you can fuck around, but it's so much damn work, keepin' it quiet. It's not worth the effort. Don't see the upside. You see the upside Joey? (Cronenberg 2005)

In the same way, Bernie, Nino and Cook are also presented as superior men. Their elitism promotes oppressing behaviour and motivates them to build a strong male personality. Cook, who works for Nino and Bernie, is the one who beats Standard in the parking lot; he is the man who is in control of the situation and who makes use of violence to impose his power. However, Bernie and Nino are the ones who really rule and decide who needs to die and when. In fact, Cook is just following orders when he beats Standard. Bernie and Nino do not hesitate when it comes to killing Cook at Nino's restaurant. Bernie imposes his power over him when he discovers that he has failed killing the Driver and that he now has the money. He uses rude and aggressive language when talking to him: "Shut the fuck up, you fucking monkey" and he also calls him "piece of shit" (Refn 2011). In the same scene, Bernie asks Nino's permission to kill Cook and he silently nods accepting his murder. Bernie violently sticks a fork in Cook's eye and then cuts his throat with a knife. Again, an act of brutal violence that reaffirms his masculinity – it being an example of structural violence that stems from their elitism and male superiority. Nino's strength and influence is also evident with his use of words: "That's why this driver's gotta go, Bernie. He's gotta go. And your pal, Shannon" (Refn 2011). Nino feels he has the authority to decide who has to die and who has to live – an episode which echoes Bernie's words at the Chinese restaurant at the end of the movie, where he explains the Driver what he has to do if he wants Irene to be safe:

> Here's what I'm prepared to offer. You give me the money, the girl is safe. Forever. Nobody knows about her. She's off the map. I can't offer you the same. So, this is what I would suggest. We conclude our deal, we'll shake hands. You start the rest of your life. Any dreams you have, or plans, or hopes for your future I think you're going to have to put that on hold. For the rest of your life you're going to be looking over your shoulder. I'm just telling you this because I want you to know the truth. But the girl is safe. (Refn 2011)

Bernie is giving the Driver clear rules about what to do. His self-perceived superiority is reflected in his words since he thinks he has the right to impose his authority. His elitism seems to

give him the right to decide over Irene's life: "Nobody knows about her. She's off the map" and over the Driver's life: "I can't offer you the same" he says. Nevertheless, Bernie's predictions about the future cannot be further from the truth since it is the Driver who eventually kills him and runs away. The Driver is able to do what he had anticipated to Irene on the phone: "I have to go somewhere and I don't think I can come back" (Refn 2011). The Driver is now in control of his own destiny and fate.

Classism is the oppression of some groups because of their social class to favour the dominant group. Richie in *A History* can be considered to belong to a high socioeconomic class. His wealth is the indicator of his power; and his masculinity is measured by status, wealth and influence over individuals in a lower position. In the same way, Nino and Bernie in *Drive* are influential and rich men; their actions are motivated by their desire for money. Nino is pictured having a party at his restaurant when the Driver is stalking him. Refn presents him as a desirable man, people want to please him – he is laughing and enjoying himself while drinking champagne with a beautiful woman. David Morgan in "Class and Masculinity" points out that

> men will be found disproportionately located in the highest levels of political, economic, educational, and cultural organizations. In this respect, we may see men as centrally involved in class practices, as individual or collective class actors. But we may also see men involved in the central discourses about class power. Many of the key theorists of class have been men, and it is reasonable to suppose that their location in gender hierarchies is as important in shaping, if not in determining, their worldviews as their locations within a class system. Of course, in reality, this distinction becomes a little blurred, as discourses and practices are always closely related. Put another way, modes of understanding and researching class may reflect gendered perspectives just as the class practices themselves will also be gendered. (2005: 168)

In both *A History* and *Drive* there seems to be a strong relationship between powerful social classes and masculinity. Strong and influential men presented in our corpus have assumed their dominant role within the patriarchal society. Men are usually identified as breadwinners; hyper-masculine violent men are the ones who control money and have authority over others. Both Richie and Bernie can be seen as the source of violence in both films; they are the ones who give orders and take advantage of their social class to rule.

Sexism is the prejudice of someone due to their sex; a prejudice which is based on traditional gender roles according to which women are generally disfavoured. Rape, sexual abuse or sexual discrimination are different types of sexism. In A History of violence there are different examples of sexist violence. One of the robbers at Tom's diner seems to have the intention to rape Charlotte and forces her to stay as a hostage. Although the rape does not take place, the man's

intentions are clear when he wipes his hand on the woman's t-shirt, touching her breasts. Moreover, Edie's apparently consented rape at the stairs is another example of structural violence stemming from sexism. After their fight, Tom shows his superiority over his wife's sex, reaffirming his masculine domination.

In *Drive* women do not have a major role. Irene seems to be the delicate woman who is waiting to be saved by the romantic hero. Blanche, the other female character in the film, is portrayed as an object: she is just a piece of Cook's plan to get the money back. In fact, once she has done her part, she is brutally killed at motel. Besides, there is a very interesting scene in the film that shows the portrayal of women as objects. After the motel sequence, the Drive goes to what seems to be a brothel and attacks Cook to find out that Nino is the responsible for Standard's death. There, where the Driver is making Cook swallow a bullet, several undressed women observe them; motionless, they are just part of the setting (Appendix II: 2g). Like the other objects in the frame, these women reinforce the masculinity of the Driver, whose strength is also emphasised by the fact that he is the only one who is standing in the centre of the room. Sexism in both films is also used by both directors as a tool to construct the masculine characters and stress their virile nature. All in all, it can be stated that elitism, classism and sexism are just some examples of some dangerous practices and ideologies from which structural violence stems from. Both films offer different episodes which are useful to decipher this type of violence and understand better its causes and brutal effects in both men and society in general.

Real Heroes: Tom/Joey and the Driver

In the previous chapter we introduced the concept of heroic violence referring to a moral necessity which often ends up with heroic deeds and heroic violent acts. Cynthia Carter in *Violence and the Media* explains that

> around 40 per cent of all acts of violence on US television are initiated by characters who are presented as positive role models. It is said that this kind of portrayal encourages children to emulate violent behaviour. Violence used by a good guy for a positive reason (to protect someone or save the world) may well be more problematic than violence initiated by a 'bad guy' who does not ultimately gain from their violent actions. (2003: 3)

John Cawelti talks about the use of justified violence by the hero. Heroes must be men who triumphantly face their problems and challenges in life without fearing death. It is true that there are female superheroes but they are not so popular as men. Wonder Woman, for instance, was the first

American female superhero, who was characterised by an extremely sexualised appearance. While male superheroes are presented as powerful, women are portrayed as weaker but with attractive bodies, so they wear costumes that reveal their beauty without focusing so much on their strength and heroic qualities: "The distinction between the idealization of male and female superheroes is in the details of that idealization. Female superheroes have fallen prey to over-sexualization, and the discussion for female superheroes, in particular their attire, can probably be best deconstructed by examining its practicality" (Romagnoli 2013: 90).

As Cawelti points out in *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture*, there seems to be a need for heroic roles in films nowadays and, therefore, American stories of violence tend to justify men's acts of violence. Cawelti thinks that those justifications of the acts of violence "are typically built into the stories themselves in the form of patterns of circumstances and choice that enforce upon the hero the necessity of acts of violence" (2004: 161). In *A History* and *Drive* we encounter two potentially aggressive heroes who apparently use their force in a moral and justified way for the benefit of other people. They are men who know how to kill, they are violent, but they are also presented as gentle men capable of self-control and affection. Tom Stall in *A History* is dubbed "an American hero" after the shooting at his diner. Yet, it is evident that Tom wants to avoid being called like that because he wants to hide his past as Joey and he does not want to attract attention. In fact, he explains to his son that he is not a hero at all, arguing that he was just lucky. Moreover, once in the hospital, he says to Edie: "I'm tired of hearing about me" (Cronenberg 2005) referring to the news on television which talk about a local hero on three different channels. However, the wife, who also shows him the front page of the local newspaper, replies: "No, I kind of like it" (Cronenberg 2005), a remark that implies Edie's attraction for Tom's new role as a heroic man. Cronenberg seems to suggest that Tom's action makes him a more desirable man for his wife. His skills as a professional killer give him striking attitudes as a strong and powerful male. However, Tom has no intention to save the world; a fact that implies escaping from the universal conception of hero. Tom refuses his label as a hero and focuses his attention on his family and on himself, without caring about local safety or any other moral obligation:

> Indeed, Tom feels so little obligation to the world at large that he has allowed his mobster enemies to flourish for more than two decades, so long as they left him and his family in peace. Tom is the classic Cronenbergian hero described by Creed, a solitary man whose decision to forsake violence has enabled his feminization, a process that the events of the film will radically undo. (Beaty 2008: 97)

This way, one can talk about a transformation in Tom's character, who will change from a calmed and somehow feminised figure into a violent and dominant manly character. There is not a lineal metamorphosis in Tom's character, but a comeback to his former violent and masculine identity, which had been hidden and, therefore, repressed. As Beaty points out, Tom's decision to escape from Philadelphia and leave his violent past behind made him become a peaceful man. His regression into the man he used to be takes place during the gunfight outside his house. To this point, Cronenberg has just suggested Tom's real identity, but the final revelation is about to come: "I should've killed you back in Philly" is what Tom says to Fogarty when finally both his family and the viewer are allowed to discover the truth. As most superheroes, Tom Stall also wears a mask. However, he wears it before transforming into Joey and welcoming violence again. The mask serves to protect Tom from the real world and conceals his secret identity as Joey Cusack; an identity that will be revealed at the end of his transformation into the masculine violent hero he used to be. Tom's mask has helped him to disguise as a caring husband and father from a small town in Indiana. After the gunfight with Fogarty's men he openly reveals his true identity and his real face – it is interesting to remember Tom's evil expression covered in blood, which marks his new self as a violent hero. Tom gets rid of his mask and shows his true face and identity.

Tom's heroism has a devastating effect on his life but also on his son Jack, who soon discovers his violent side: "Cronenberg allows us to imagine for a brief moment a film that is very much about the intersection of fame and heroism and the consequences for a community of glorifying violence Yet this is clearly not what the film is about at all" (Beaty 2008: 86). After killing Fogarty and his men, Tom receives a call from his brother Richie, who wants him to go to Philadelphia. If Tom does not accept, he suggests that he will come to Millbrook to kill his family. Once in Philadelphia, Tom tries to make peace with his brother but he refuses and orders his men to murder him. Surprisingly, Tom kills everyone, including his brother. Following the pattern of heroic films, Tom successfully eliminates the 'bad guys' alone. Yet, one cannot avoid questioning his role as a hero. Tom is a hyper-violent man with a hyper-violent past. But it is true, however, that without his obscure background as a professional killer he would not have had the skills to save the people at his diner or his family. We could affirm that it is his aggressive past and the later regression into the man he used to be back in Philadelphia that allows him to protect his family.

After the massacre in Philadelphia, Tom washes his face in his brother's lake as a way to get rid of his past identity forever. This act symbolises Joey's cleansing and final baptism as Tom Stall. At the end of the film it is difficult for Tom to be considered a hero by his family and the viewer. His acts of violence are in some way punished by his family, who does not welcome him after killing his brother. Tom sits at the table with his family and they do not talk. The room is quiet and

the atmosphere is tense (Appendix II: 1f). Although his wife seems not to accept him at first, Jack and Sarah approve his return by giving him a plate and something to eat. Back in Philadelphia Tom's brother gives a speech about the drawbacks of having a family and asks Tom whether he is happy or not with his role as a caring father and husband. Making reference to Richie's words, Cronenberg suggests that being a family man is just as miserable as Richie's solitary life. The analysis of the scene can be done at two different levels: from the reaction of the characters, or what is known as the intradiegetic interaction, and from the reaction of the audience, or extradiegetic interaction. The emptiness of the scene is devastating on both levels. However, it is true that the extradiegetic interaction is even harder. The viewer cannot avoid feeling Tom's psychological suffering when he is forced to act as Tom for the second time in order to fit into his idyllic family. On the other hand, at an intradiegetic level, Edie is the one who feels betrayed by her husband, Tom is a stranger, he is Joey. And although Jack and Sarah invite him to be their father again, it remains uncertain whether he will be able to perform Tom's role. In fact, Cronenberg seems to suggest that Joey will have to learn how to live with Tom, finding an equilibrium and, therefore, adopting a new identity. The key is in understanding Cronenberg's final message: Is Tom Stall a really good man who is just defending his family? Is Joey Cusack just a killer who wants to destroy his enemies? It is impossible for Joey to wear Tom's mask again, since his true nature as a masculine violent man has been revealed. The final scene presents a Tom/Joey character, a two-faced man with a new identity who is waiting to be accepted by his family.

In *Drive* we are introduced to a man who is a "A Real Hero", according to the dreamy neon-pop song by the band College which is part of the film's soundtrack. Even before having the chance to perform any heroic action, Refn decides to state the Driver's role in the film: he "is a real human being and a real hero". When the song is playing, the Driver is with Irene and Benicio in his car, driving along the banks of Los Angeles river; where an atmosphere of hope and joy seems to embrace them. The Driver hardly speaks, he is good at driving and kind with children; however, he mutates into a professional killer once he is annoyed. From Irene's point of view he is a hero, a tough man in a bright satin jacket who is going to do everything to protect her and her son. As Cawelti states: "The hero must be wonderfully potent, but also ascetic and pure in his habits; he must avoid erotic entanglements in order to put his whole force into his moment of violent redemption" (2004: 177); a definition that perfectly fits with the Driver's characterisation. He is portrayed as a pure figure who is just allowed to show his darker side when violence comes into play. When he decides to help Standard there is no doubt he is thinking of performing the announced masculine role of hero. The Driver asks Standard about the men who beat him in the car park, and Standard cannot avoid laughing when he imagines him as his rescuer: "Who were they?",

asks the Driver, to which Benicio's father sarcastically responds: "What the fuck are you going to do? You're gonna go beat them up for me?" (Refn 2011). In fact, he is really going to beat the men for him. The Driver will embody the powerful archetype of a hero to save the ones he loves from the villains:

> Refn correctly argues that *Drive*'s foundation is in fairy tale, particularly its thematic of a character's discovery of his own heroism, which Driver finds through the course of nurturing and protecting Irene, who's made paradoxically more vulnerable when her convict husband returns home from prison. The necessary elimination of dragons – in the form of Albert Brooks' ice-cold mobster Bernie Rose and Ron Perlman's put-upon mobster Nino, to say nothing of a few nameless hitmen along the way – doesn't so much make Driver into a killer, although he wreaks revenge with frighteningly intelligent brutality. (Koehler 2013)

The Driver is an enigmatic figure who satisfies the ones around him. Shannon is impressed by his skills as a driver and as a mechanic and he openly talks about his qualities to Bernie and Irene. Moreover, Irene seems also fascinated by him after they meet; and the same happens with Benicio, whose connection with the Driver is omnipresent throughout the story. As Refn explains in an interview,

> [t]hrough the course of the film, Driver begins to envision what he means to those around him. So does Irene: Is she in love with the idea of Driver or is she in love with the man? It's like he's a figment of her imagination. Is it her dream or not? Look at Tourneur's films, and there's a lot of this tension between a character's sense of imagining and reality, in a way, between heaven and hell. He represents her needs, emotionally, spiritually, sexually. He's the human being she needs to connect with, and then her husband comes home from prison and she needs a hero to protect her. He may be real, but he's also doing part of what she needs in her own imagination. (in Koehler 2013)

The hero's dilemma is that he is trapped between two worlds. As the song points out he is "a real human being and a real hero". In fact, one could say that he is a human being during the day and a hero at night. After the elevator scene, his transformation is completed and there seems to be no coming back. This scene is the heart of the film: the Driver has to decide between being a romantic hero for Irene or a violent hero capable of indescribable brutality. The truth is that the Driver cannot have Irene; and after their poetic kiss, he smashes the head of the would-be murderer in front of her. The impossibility to get the girl is part of the driver's sacrifice to become a heroic figure. Like Batman and Spiderman he is doomed to have an impossible relationship with the woman he loves. Superheroes need to fulfill their duty as rescuers and the Driver is not an

exception. After the elevator scene he understands that his nature as a violent and masculine hero condemns him to remaining alone.

As a 'real hero' in heroic films the Driver also has his own costume. When he is presented as a stuntman he is dressed as a policeman and he is wearing a creepy bald mask. This same mask will be used to stalk Nino at his restaurant and finally kill him in the river (Appendix II: 2h). The Driver has already assumed his new role: distancing himself from the real world, he is now performing the part of a superhero with his mask. It is time to avenge his friend Shannon, who was killed by Bernie, and to murder the two dangerous villains, Nino and Bernie.

The scorpion jacket, which has already been mentioned, is another elemental item for the construction of the Driver's identity. The jacket is the Driver's amour. When he is performing the role of the caring man with Irene and Benicio he does not wear the jacket, with the exception of a scene when they are riding the elevator, a scene which can be interpreted as a warning of the brutal violence that will take place there. The Jacket is part of the hero's costume, it symbolises his transformation into the dangerous and powerful scorpion. In fact, the superhero world is full of animal symbolism: Batman mutates with a bat, Spiderman with a spider and the Driver mutates with a scorpion. Therefore, the jacket functions as a way of changing one identity for another; it helps the Driver to become a killer and to metamorphose, fulfilling its purpose to convey the double identity of heroes.

As a hero, the Driver wants to give Irene and Benicio protection in the same way that superheroes want to protect their nation or the people they love. However, it is not clear why he wants to do it; he seems to feel a moral obligation that, in some way, justifies his actions. When trying to compare the Driver with a character in a mainstream heroic film, problems start to emerge. Batman or Spiderman are not hyper-violent men who perform brutal killings. Batman avoids killing people just for the sake of it, and so does Spiderman. On the contrary, the Driver shoots people in cold blood and makes men swallow bullets. Through him, the conventional image of the traditional hero is problematised. Both him and Tom in *A History of Violence* are examples of tough heroes whose hyper-masculinity consolidate them as powerful and violent men. The characters' over-masculinisation is a way to reinforce their role as dominant patriarchal figures. They are potent, invincible and strong, and some elements of the *mise-en-scène* help us to decipher their personality, as we have seen through our analyses. Tom's clothes and physical appearance also help to build his image as a masculine hero. His appearance echoes the style of John Wayne, the icon of the American cowboy. Both share a distinctive rugged masculinity and their apparent honesty and sincerity. In the same way as Tom in *A History*, Wayne's image in films attempts to glorify virility, and his tone of voice indicates nothing but charm and conviction. Tom can be understood as a

descendant of the western hero. The western is one of the best genres in which one can find the image of the tough man and where celebration of patriarchy takes place. Tom may be seen as one of those western heroes who comes from the wilderness and tries to adapt to society and the law. The Driver's toothpick also becomes a sign of masculinity since it is used as a device to show toughness and courage. Besides, the Driver's need for speed and his fixation for sport cars can also be read as a sign of his virile personality. Driving is what gives him freedom; it offers him mobility, strength and sense of control. Another interesting aspect to comment is the characters' movements and body language, as well as their expression. Both Tom and the Driver are characterised by a noticeable secrecy and silence; they do not show their feelings to fulfill their role as dominant men – it is appropriate for men not to show their softness and not to be emotional with others. In the same way, superheroes hide their vulnerability and their deeper feelings behind their masks and cloaks, Tom and the Driver hide themselves in their worlds of violence.

In *A History of Violence* and *Drive* we have observed a deconstruction of the traditional heroic figure as the glorious man who possesses extraordinary powers or qualities and dedicates his life to protect others. Moving away from the prototypical hero, both Cronenberg and Refn have opted to show two men whose heroic masculinity is condemned to violence. Both directors offer a complex study of the nature of violence and its link to masculinity through the figures of Tom/Joey and the Driver. Breaking the barriers between good and evil, both men embrace violence to enhance their patriarchal and dominant personae to fulfill their role as masculine heroes in a world where destruction and death seem to be justified.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study has explored issues of men and masculinities and their relationship with violence as represented in contemporary film. It has attempted to demonstrate the thesis that violence is the key element in the traditional male discourse of power since it constitutes men as subjects and it functions as the basis of canonical masculinity. Moving away from biological essentialism, importance has been given to the cultural and social acceptation of violence. Masculinity studies analyses masculinity as a socially constructed feature, moving away from its 'natural' quality. The study has centred on white heterosexual masculinities in contemporary U.S. culture, more specifically, in independent cinema of the 21st century. Therefore, the present study has tried to revise the traditional portrayals of men as hegemonic patriarchal and dominant figures and their more intimate relationship with the world of violence in the selected corpus – *A History of Violence* and *Drive*, which can be taken as being representative of the North American microcosm

The film industry and its importance in our society have been presented in the first stages of this project. With the emergence of film studies in the 20th century, there has been a growing interest in studying films as a cultural product. Film studies does not focus on technical aspects of film production, but on the artistic and narrative nature of cinema. Today film studies is found around the world, this growing discipline has helped to change our perception of films and now we conceive them not only as a source of mere entertaining but as a valuable cultural product that has a lot to offer. The relationship between gender and cinema and, more specifically, masculinity and cinema has also been analysed to offer a general idea of the current situation of this field of study. It was Steven Neale's essay "Masculinity as Spectacle" in 1983 which changed the perception of men in films. Until then men had just been considered as the voyeuristic figure, the active and controlling being opposed to the passive role of women. Neal pointed out that the identification with a character in a film is a complex process and that it was not as simple as distinguishing between male and female; masculinity, as femininity, deserved a more exhaustive study. From that moment on, interest in deciphering the male character in films started to grow. The male hero in classical Hollywood films or aggression and violence in westerns are just some examples of the innumerable studies on men. What it became clear is that the representation of masculinity is neither simple nor opaque. However, although an increasing number of researchers have been studying issues on men and masculinity, special attention has been given to white masculinity. Hollywood cinema is normally constructed on the basis of the dominant ideology, reproducing the conservative patriarchal narratives both in terms of content and of form. Therefore, I have to state the importance of the choice and relevance of the corpus, two independent North American films of the 21st century. Moving away from mainstream film, both *A History of Violence* and *Drive* have

proved to be valuable to provide new styles and techniques as well as interesting aspects to analyse concerning the topic of men and violence.

Moving on in the research process, in the first chapter of the work that now concludes the main intention has been to provide the development of men's studies and masculinity studies from its appearance to the present day. Gender, which has been deeply linked with women's studies, has been useful to rediscover the universe of men and decipher their traditional status. Masculinity has been explained and deconstructed implying that there is not just one masculinity but many, introducing the concept of plural masculinities. After the explanation of the main trajectory of men's studies in general, the focus has shifted towards contemporary North American studies of masculinity, with a final overview of the evolution of the concepts of masculinity and men's studies.

The second chapter has attempted to give an explanation on the relationship between masculinities and violence. Starting with the conceptualisations of violence, it has been stated that violence is an important part of our lives and it seems that it will accompany us in the near future. Apart from the presentation of violence that we encounter in the media or in popular culture, humans experience a high number of violent episodes during their everyday activity. However, although it is commonly thought that humans possess a violent nature, it has been said that we are not really prone to violent behaviour since violence is not an inherent trait of human beings. While we are born with the capacity of aggression, we become culturally violent. Trying to provide socio-historical and cultural explanations of its origin, rather than associating violence to biological factors, we have centred on the relationship between masculinity and violence and its association with the culture of the United States. The last step has been to present a brief panorama of the history of masculinities and violence in American film, taking into account the chosen corpus. It has been argued that North American cinema has proved to be essential for the understanding of masculine representations and the construction of prototypes of manhood.

Chapter three has offered the analysis of the bond between violence and masculinity through the selected movies. Both *A History of Violence* and *Drive* have resulted useful in this study due to the presentation of violence as a central element in their stories. Observing the effects of violence in both films and their relationship with the concept masculinity, one has been able to appreciate the importance and relevance of violence for the male characters and for the story in general. The protagonists' gender identity is altered due to their relationship with different types of violence. Both men, the Driver and Tom, have been studied as representations of men who live in a world that does not belong to them, a world where violence is their only instrument to complete their masculine identity. The phenomenon has been studied following Iadicola and Shupe's classification of violence, which comprises three main categories: interpersonal, institutional and structural

violence, to which Cawelti's concept of heroic violence has been added due to its relevance to cinematic narratives. The analysis of the two films selected has proved them to be valid to illustrate examples of the different types of violence, i.e., both films have shown aspects of the North American society that are key to understand the origins and development of violence in that particular culture.

The present study has, therefore, attempted to dissect violence into the previously mentioned four main categories: interpersonal, institutional, structural violence, and finally, heroic violence. In the theoretical chapter concerning violence we agreed that violence stems from aggressiveness, which is an innate activity; but it is aggressiveness that is altered by sociocultural factors that turns it into something intentionally harmful. Sanmartín and Molina are the ones who talk about two concepts when dealing with violence: biologically aggressive and culturally violent behaviour. Both in *A History of Violence* and *Drive* these two concepts have been applied to have a better understanding of the characters. Tom and the Driver, whose past defines them as the men they are, are biologically aggressive and culturally violent individuals. As it was presented in the second chapter men feel the urge to prove that they were different from women. Violence is the tool through which they can show their power and maleness. In fact, in this dissertation one has seen that violence serves as a tool for physical and psychological survival for men. They gain respect and control by making use of violence. It is through violent behaviour that they fight their fears and gain control of their actions and control over others. Violence is also seen as empowering. Men show their power and manliness through aggressive actions. They undergo violent tests to prove their manhood; they need violence to prove their virility and strength.

Through this analysis, ideas of biological essentialism when dealing with violence have been studied, arriving at the conclusion that testosterone is not responsible for masculine violent nature. However, it has turned out to be true that in both films men are the ones who show signs of violence; they are portrayed as the dominant and violent sex. Men think they are allowed to impose a justified supremacy over others, a feature that is easily recognisable in both films, since men seem to think they are superior to others just because they control them with the use of violence. Violence has been presented as paramount in the construction of the male stereotype and the discourse of power. It does not come as a surprise that neither in *A History* nor in *Drive* have been women pictured as violent characters. In them, aggressive crime is exclusively men's business. However, not all men have been portrayed as violent. Male characters such as the police officer in *A History* and the Driver's employee in *Drive* are peaceful men who do not make use of violence. These characters are men who, although living a violent world, have learned to control their aggressiveness and have opted for nonviolence.

When studying interpersonal violence, five main forms have been presented: homicide, juvenile victimisation, physical and sexual child abuse, rape and stalking. In this study we have concentrated on homicide, this type being the most relevant act of violence in both films. Although our corpus is not very extensive, in *A History of Violence* and *Drive* there have been various examples to illustrate homicide as a form of interpersonal violence. Both the Driver and Tom commit different homicides which perfectly fit into Barak's categorisation. Through very graphic and violent scenes, an analysis of the most violent episodes has been done so as to decipher men's attitudes towards the violent world that both films uncover.

As for institutional violence, Barak discusses that there are five representative forms: family violence, childhood maltreatment, school violence, gang violence, and police and penal violence. Again, not all forms of this kind of violence have been dealt with; so the centres of attention have been family violence and childhood maltreatment, key to understand the evolution of both characters and their male identities. The analysis of family violence has encountered some problems in this dissertation, since in *Drive* family violence is incorporated *in absentia* to contribute to the characterisation of Irene's husband, helping to develop the Driver's brutal and masculine nature. On the contrary, in *A History* different episodes have been looked at to have a better understanding of men's actions and behaviour. As far as childhood maltreatment is concerned, both *A History* and *Drive* include some crucial instances. It has been proved that violence can have a negative effect on children and teenagers and how devastating it can be for them.

Structural violence, which refers to those who fight against social structures that promote suffering through exploitation or intolerance over others, refers to those situations that affect basic human needs, such as welfare, identity or freedom, as a consequence of social stratification and, therefore, there is no direct violence. Due to the fact that the causes that provoke structural violence require a very exhaustive analysis that would not fit into a dissertation like this one, we have not attempted to describe all types of structural violence. The present study has dealt with the violent consequences that derive from hierarchical relations in society according to aspects such as class or gender identity and their relationship with the characters' violent actions and their masculinity. Elitism, classism and sexism have been the common sources of structural violence which have been discussed in the corpus.

Privileged elitist status empowers men and allows them to make use of coercion over others. Their elitism promotes oppressing behaviour and motivates them to incorporate violence in their lives. In the same way, there seems to be a strong relationship between powerful social classes and masculinity. Strong and influential men presented in our corpus have assumed their dominant role

within the patriarchal society. Hyper-masculine violent men are the ones who control money and have authority over others. In the same vein, sexism has been presented as the prejudice of someone due to their sex. According to traditional gender roles, women are generally disfavoured and men are the ones whose dominant nature and patriarchal portrayal allows them to act in a forceful and coercive way. In both films sexism is linked to violent episodes that have offered interesting insights in the analysis of male characters.

Finally, through the analysis of heroic violence, it has been discussed how some films nowadays tend to justify male acts of violence. The protagonists of the films in our corpus are two potentially aggressive heroes who apparently use their force in a moral way for the benefit of other people. They are men who know how to kill, they are violent, but they are also presented as gentle men capable of self-control and affection. In this study it has been observed a deconstruction of the traditional heroic figure; men whose heroic masculinity is condemned to violence. Through the figures of Tom/Joey and the Driver, it has been seen that violence is linked to masculinity. Men accept violence to welcome their patriarchal and dominant nature, mutating into masculine heroes in a reality where destruction and death seems to be allowed.

Taking into account some of the limitations in this study, it is important to highlight that some important aspects of research will be useful for further investigations in the field of violence and masculinity. It has been impossible to analyse in detail all types of violence in our corpus. It has to be admitted that the corpus, consisting of two films, has not offered enough opportunities to portray all the examples of violence. When studying interpersonal violence, some subtypes such as juvenile victimisation, physical and sexual child abuse, rape and stalking have not been considered; a fact that has to be taken into account for other investigations on the topic. As for institutional violence, the centre of study has been family violence and childhood maltreatment, again leaving aside some subtypes of institutional violence. The same has happened with structural violence, since not all subtypes of this type of violence has been analysed. It has to be stated that each type of violence is very complex and extensive on its own and that each type could have been studied on its own in a more detailed way. However, this research has tried to establish a first contact with the studies of violence and has given priority to its general panorama and their relationship with masculinity.

Heroic violence has been, perhaps, the most productive type of violence when related to the corpus. Both films depict men whose masculinity is moulded by their heroism. Although this research has tried to give a thorough account of their heroic roles and their actions when related to violence, further research could offer more detailed information on the topic. A comparative analysis between masculine and violent modern superheroes such as Batman or Spiderman and the

two protagonists in the corpus could result in a very interesting topic for exploration. Apart from this, going deeper in non-violent characters in the films could also be another possible study. Therefore, one could study the relationship between violence as seen in Tom and the Driver and non-violence, embodied in characters such as Sam, the police officer in *A History*, and Shannon, the Driver's employee in *Drive*. Having offered different ideas for future investigations one could state that the possibilities are endless and that this study has done nothing but start a debate that has a lot to offer. Hopefully, this work will encourage other scholars to start new research in the field of men's studies and masculinities.

Clearly, this dissertation has not attempt to give an exhaustive analysis on North American men and masculinities in general. It has centred on masculinity and violence as a specific dynamic. In the same way, the corpus has not been extensive, trying to portray a historical trajectory of violence in North American cinema. It has consisted in two films, *A History of Violence* and *Drive*, which picture violence as unpalatable, bitter and sometimes offensive. In both of them aggression is disturbing and seems to have a major role. The innovative style of the two productions, the slow pace, harmonious music and the graphic use of violence makes them unique and fit for the present study, in which cinema has been key to provide representations of manhood and violence that illustrate current debates about the two topics. Issues of violence and masculinity, thus, will continue to deserve our attention in the future since, unfortunately, apart from being present in fiction, violence is also very present in real, everyday life.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I
Film Data

***A History of Violence* (2005)**

- **SUMMARY**

A History of Violence (2005) is an adaptation of the graphic novel of the same name published in 1997 by John Wagner and Vince Locke. It focuses on Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen), a man who lives in a quiet town in Indiana with his wife Edie (Maria Bello) and their two children. Their lives change when Tom is forced to act in self-defence using violence against two robbers who are about to kill the waitress that works at his diner. From that moment on, the life of his family is turned upside down. Tom is portrayed as a local hero by the media, and he is soon visited by Carl Fogarty (Ed Harris), who claims that Tom is named Joey Cusack, a gangster who worked with him in Philadelphia.

- **TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

Director: David Cronenberg

Producers: David Cronenberg / Justis Greene / Josh Braun

Writers: John Wagner and Vince Locke (graphic novel) / John Olson (screenplay)

Genre: Crime / Drama / Thriller

Country: USA / Germany

Language: English

Runtime: 96 min

- **ARTISTIC INFORMATION**

Viggo Mortensen: Tom Stall / Joey Cusack

Maria Bello: Edie Stall

Ed Harris: Carl Fogarty

William Hurt: Richie Cusack

Ashton Holmes: Jack Stall

Peter MacNeill: Sheriff Sam

Stephen McHattie: Leland

Greg Bryk: Billy

Kyle Schmid: Bobby Singer

***Drive* (2011)**

- **SUMMARY**

Drive (2011) is Nicolas Winding Refn's adaptation of James Sallis' novel of the same title, published in 2005. It centres on an unnamed man (Ryan Gosling) who makes a living as a mechanic and as a movie stuntman, but who also moonlights as a driver for criminal businesses. The protagonist's life changes when he meets his new neighbour Irene (Carey Mulligan) and her son Benicio (Kaden Leo). Benicio's father, Standard Gabriel (Oscar Isaac), is released from prison and immediately asked to pay his debt to a gangster. The Driver will offer his help to Standard so as to aid, by extension, Irene and Benicio.

- **TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

Director: Nicolas Winding Refn

Producers: Michel Litvak / John Palermo / Marc Platt / Gigi Pritzker / Adam Siegel

Writers: Hossein Amini (screenplay) / James Sallis (book)

Genre: Crime / Drama

Country: USA

Language: English

Runtime: 100 min

- **ARTISTIC INFORMATION**

Ryan Gosling: Driver

Carey Mulligan: Irene

Bryan Cranston: Shannon

Albert Brooks: Bernie

Oscar Isaac: Standard

Christina Hendricks: Blanche

Ron Perlman: Nino

Kaden Leos: Benicio

James Biberi: Cook

APPENDIX II
Key Scenes

1. *A History of Violence* (2005)

a) Tom kills the two robbers at his diner.

b) Leland's disfigured face after the shooting at Tom's diner.

c) Bobby attacks Jack in the locker room.

d) Jack kills Fogarty to save his father.

e) Violent sex scene.

f) Final scene at the diner table.

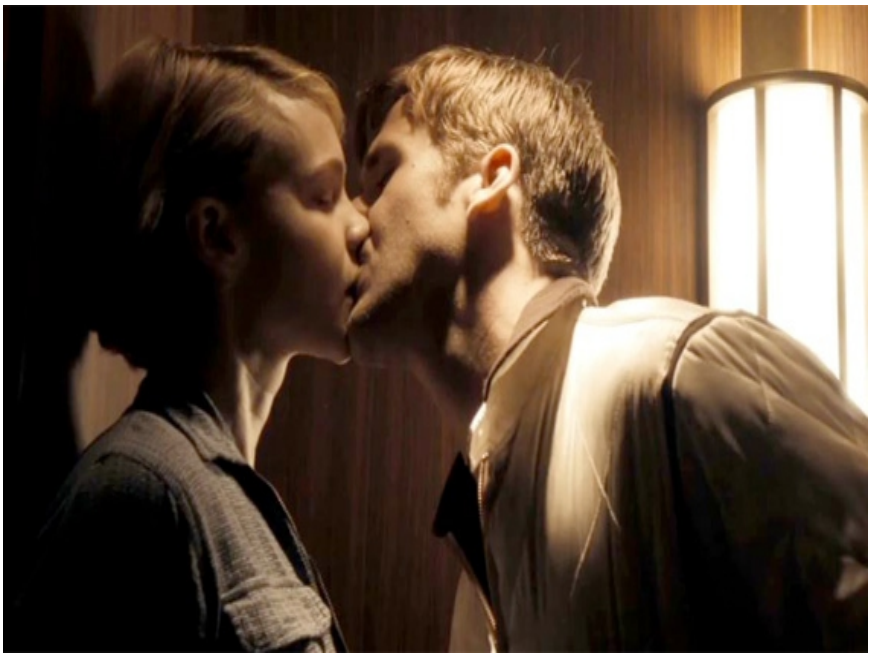
2. *Drive* (2011)

a) The Driver presented as the 'tough guy'.

b) The scorpion jacket.

c) The Driver takes Benicio to bed.

d) The Driver, covered in blood, in the motel.



e) The Driver kisses Irene in the elevator.

f) The Driver smashes the would-be murderer's head in the elevator.

g) The Driver threatens Cook in the brothel.

h) Driver's stunt mask.

APPENDIX III

A DVD copy of the films *A History of Violence* (2005) and *Drive* (2011) is provided to each of the members of the committee.